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AN EXAMINATION OF FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS AND PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL SUPPORT OFFERED AT ALBANY TECHNICAL COLLEGE.

By

Wendy Wilson

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

the Degree of Doctor of Education

in Curriculum and Leadership

Higher Education

Columbus State University

Columbus, GA

December 2017

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the three women who shaped and molded me into the person I am today, my mother, Barbara Cleveland, my grandmother, Mittie Law and my aunt, Dr. Ameemah Omar. Despite my mom and aunt's transition from this earth, I continue to be fueled by the gifts they imparted. Mittie Law aka Gram, this earned dissertation is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you for your prayers, trust and belief in me.

Acknowledgements

Fulfilling the dream of writing and completing my dissertation has been both challenging and rewarding. I will be forever thankful and indebted to my family, friends and mentors that supported me throughout this journey. I am elated and honored to have been guided by my dissertation committee: Dr. Wendi Jenkins, Dr. Pamela Lemoine and Dr. Michael Richardson. You not only led this effort, you mentored throughout. I will be forever grateful for your leadership and support.

Thanks to President Anthony Parker and Dr. Kimberly Lee for granting me the opportunity to use Albany Technical College as my study site. The data collected and information learned confirmed the many reasons why Albany Technical College is recognized as one of the leading post-secondary institutions throughout southwest Georgia.

Abstract

This study examined the perceptions of first generation students and program administrators regarding the academic and social support offered at Albany Technical College(ATC). This is a mixed-methods study that offered insight into the programmatic practices designed to improve the retention and graduation outcomes of first generation (first gen) students at ATC. This study complements the current body of literature about the challenges and conditions that influence the matriculation and graduation of the underserved population. Post-secondary institutions that enroll first generation students can benefit from learning about the experiences shared by student and program administrator participants.

Prospective participants were identified with the support of Albany Technical College's Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The institution is the only technical college within Albany, Georgia. Enrollment includes over 3,000 full time students and 2,500 part-time students of which over 75% represent underserved and or first generation students.

The study involved 37 students and five program administrators. Of the the 37 students, all 37 participated in the survey aspect of the study and eight participated in semi-structured interviews. Five program administrators participated in the semi-structured interviews. The survey used was designed, administered analyzed through the instrument, Survey Monkey. Interviews were transcribed, coded and a comparative analysis was conducted across

all study participants.

Perspectives offered by both groups correlated regarding the influence of socioeconomic status and limited academic preparedness. Contrasting perspectives regarding students limited engagement of support services were identified. Overall student and program administrator study participants concurred that academic and social integration programming lend to the academic and social development of first generation students attending the college.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities were in the business of offering academic programming and support initiatives that led to the attainment of degrees, earned by the student customer base. Due to the variance and diversity of student populations within post- secondary systems distinguishing student populations aided in the identification and selection of students and supported the potential to succeed for both the student and institution. Classifications and characteristics were considered pre and post admission. Student classifications included but were not limited to race, gender, full or part-time, international, traditional and non-traditional status. Characteristics influenced the potential for success for both the student and the institution (Petty, 2014). Characteristics included but were not limited to academic preparedness, socio-economic backgrounds, exposure to role models and level of understanding specific to matriculation (Banks-Santali, 2015). Both classifications and characteristics factored into the selection and admissions process; however, any or all of the aforementioned influenced or hindered retention and degree attainment once a student was admitted. Certain student demographics had a high demonstrated incidence of low retention and graduation as result of the characteristics associated (Wang, 2014). As a result, it was not uncommon for post- secondary practitioners responsible for the retention, and graduation to apply academic and social systems designed to counter characteristics that resulted into issues or challenges that impeded overall student success (Kluckzykowski, 2014).

Research was extensive on the subject of student characteristics and classifications, applicable definitions and the relevance to retention and graduation efforts. Common and distinguishing classification terminology used to identify included: race, gender, socioeconomic

status and first generation (Mathewson, 2016). Just as recruitment, retention and graduation factor into the success of post- secondary institutions, the student designations offered insight into student outcomes at post -secondary institutions (Ward, Siegel & Davenport, 2012).

Researchers reported that under-served student populations were viewed as unique due to low rates of degree completion in post-secondary institutions, particularly when compared to other student demographics (Gibbons &Woodside, 2014). Tinto (2001), asserted that when colleges and universities played an integral role in the academic success and social integration of student populations, particularly the under-served, academic success and degree completion increased. The researcher suggested the student integration model entailed the development of cohesive student/faculty relationships and student interaction with learning communities and socially based events. When institutions failed to service students in the areas of academic and social support, success within the collegiate environment was hampered (Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014). However, when consideration was given to students with characteristics that influenced collegiate success, retention and graduation outcomes rose (Petty, 2014).

Selingo (2013) reported there are over 5300 colleges and universities within the United States. The range of institutional classifications and academic offerings were also expansive. Private, public, two- year, four- year, technical emphasis, graduate or undergraduate represented a small sample of how they were identified and differentiated. Regardless the classification or type of post -secondary institution, underserved or underrepresented students experienced challenges directly tied to circumstances that existed prior to college admission, directly influencing opportunities for successful degree completion (Olson, 2014). Under-served or under-represented students were defined and classified based on prior experiences or conditions

or by racial or ethnic backgrounds. Low income students, first generation students, non-traditional, disabled, minority backgrounds, non-native English speaking students, having dependent children, single parents, having earned a high school equivalency diploma and financially independent from parents, students of color and academically underprepared, were a few of many descriptions associated with underserved populations matriculating and graduating from post-secondary institutions (Engle & Tinto, 1999).

First generation (first gen) students represented a unique segment of the under-served population within the post- secondary education system (Pike, & Kuh, 2005). Unlike other under-served students this group was often unfamiliar with the college experience or process due to their parent's lack of exposure or familiarity. As a result of unique characteristic, first gens experienced high student attrition and low degree completion (Jenkins, 2015). Policy makers and higher education practitioners considered the influence of first gen characteristics and attempted to address it through academic and social inclusion programming and initiatives (Duke, 2017).

Of the over 5000 colleges and universities throughout the United States that admitted first generation students, none were exempt from considering the associated challenges when educating and graduating them (Jenkins, Belaner, London, Connally & Duron, 2013). In addition to consideration, institutions had to work to achieve an integration of academic and socialization within the traditional collegiate structure. Critically examining how all characteristics associated with first gens factored into the level of success achieved during the college experience was essential to both the demographic and the institution (Banks-Santelli, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Throughout higher education, practitioners defined first generation (first gens) students as students whose parents never completed educational programming that yielded a minimum baccalaureate degree, or one who had never attended a college or university. The designation was acutely relevant as researchers and practitioners who studied retention and graduation achievements of various student populations noted that when compared to non-first gen students, first gens experienced challenges that hindered retention and graduation at higher levels. First gen researchers and practitioners asserted there was a direct correlation to the demographics' challenged matriculation and degree attainment and their parents' lack of college experience and completion. This correlation to parents' lack of educational experience manifested in the first gens' ability to navigate the academic and social systems of a college, essential to the degree attainment and access into the desired job market.

The implications of students' lack of academic preparation and ability to adapt to the collegiate environment were broad. Institutions with high concentrations of first gen students also experienced the consequences of the challenges associated with the population. Low retention and graduation numbers impacted reputation, ability to recruit and in some cases the ability to receive public and private funding support. These issues exceeded the realm of higher education. When the number of graduates with basic and specialized skills sets diminished, markets and industries suffered, influencing the overall economy. This underscored the research reporting the issue was not isolated but instead problematic for many post-secondary institutions.

Thus the researcher proposed to identify and frame how academic preparedness, lack of college educated role models, social integration and institutional impact influenced first gens' success. The study was supported with the perspectives of involved parties within an institution

that attempted to counter identified challenges through targeted programing. Ultimately, the goal was to contribute to the larger body of research on first gens by showcasing the practices employed by an institution based on the individual and possible correlating views of study participants.

Academic preparedness

For some student populations the academic rigors experienced prior to college contrasted starkly to post college matriculation. Meeting demands and rigors were particularly challenging for students academically underprepared (Lunceford, 2011). Colleges and universities encountered an increased number of students who were deficient in core competencies impacting the ability to matriculate to an advanced program of study (Housel & Harvey, 2012). As a result, post- secondary institutions were forced to implement remediation courses for the purpose of instilling necessary skills, knowledge and understanding that supported degree pursuits and attainment. A significant number of the students requiring assistance represented the first gen demographic (Duke, 2015).

Smith (2015) noted that 52% of ACT-tested first generation college students failed to meet the four college readiness established benchmarks. In addition, 9 out of 10 of first generation students who took the pre-college entrance examination noted they planned to attend college. The desire to attend and complete was essential to degree pursuit; however, having the academic foundation that supported this pursuit was also critical to the process. If academic under-preparedness was a factor, degree completion was delayed or hindered for the first gens and exacerbated other challenges that also existed (Cabrera, Miner & Milem, 2013).

Lack of college educated role models

Many first gens discovered the terrain of the college challenging due to limited exposure and consistent engagement with college educated role models prior to admission (Banks- Santilli, 2013). The benefit of having parents or close family members who modeled the college experience was often lost to this population. Lack of role models, limited or no exposure to collegiate environments prior to admission complicated students' ability to successfully adapt while concurrently meeting the expectations of selected academic disciplines (Magnan, 2015).

Lack of engagement with minority college educated role models prior to and during college also influenced the challenges experienced of the underserved, first gen student (Jenkins, Balanger, Londono, Connally & Duron, 2013). Satin (2000) reported that underserved first gens who were able to engage and interact with minority faculty and peers, expressed satisfaction and fared better with the overall academic and social experience.

Social climate and integration

Social climate and integration also heavily factored into degree completion for first gens pursuing a post-secondary education. College under normal conditions and circumstances was often difficult. When challenges were compounded with unfavorable social climates, healthy integration was difficult to achieve for the first gen (Padgett, Johnson, Pascarella, 2012).

In addition to the academic aspect, first gens often lacked familiarity with the social aspect of attending college. Exposure to established networks and role models aided social adaptation and acclimation and improved opportunities of understanding, clarity and expectation before the college experience was initiated (Shackner, 2015). When these networks and social systems were absent, stressors mounted complicating the first gens' overall experience and ability to earn a degree (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011).

Institutional impact

Academic and social challenges were not isolated to the demographic, but swayed the respective institutions' success. Failure to consider and address issues associated with retention and graduation in particular influenced an institution's ability to survive and thrive (Almazrua, 2016). Institutions receiving state and federal funding were held accountable for the number of students they retained and graduated. Some states adopted a formula funding method. The number of students admitted, retained and ultimately graduated impacted funding received. For example, the state of Georgia determined funding allocation to public institutions based on student enrollment (Hodges, 2013). As these numbers increased so did funding allocation. Conversely, as enrollment dropped, so did funding allocation. If the latter occurred, it then became critically essential for an institution to consider and address factors that contributed to the retention and graduate success of students. Failing to do so was particularly problematic for institutions that admitted high populations of students identified as having difficulty adjusting to and completing college.

Toutkoushian (2015) asserted because of the identified challenges and issues, first gens were at a disadvantage when compared to the non-first gen counterpart from the onset of matriculation. Experiences of one or more of the identified challenges impeded or derailed the first gens ability to successfully complete degree pursuits at the respective institution they attended (Hope, 2016). The associated challenges not only impacted the success of the student population, but the institution attended. Low success rates effected reputation, retention, graduation and funding support.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher proposed to study the issues associated the academic and social integration development of first generation students. Emphasis was placed

on the public, post-secondary institution, Albany Technical College and how key stakeholders perceived academic and social support offered as it related to retention and graduation outcomes.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of first gen students regarding academic and social support offered at Albany Technical College?

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of program administrators regarding academic and social support offered to first generation students at Albany Technical College?

Research Question 3

To what extent do these perceptions of first gens and program administrators differ?

Methodology

The mixed method research design was best suited for the examination of the study participants. The research goals entailed the study of perspectives provided individuals engaged the academic and social support process offered at Albany Technical College. Perspectives could not be obtained through a sole quantitative approach, as data collection was limited to methods of measurement.

According to Denham and Onwegbuzie (2014), qualitative methods helped researchers understand and connect meaning to experiences. "Qualitative researchers tend to investigate not just what, where, and when, but more importantly the why and how of events, experiences, and behaviors "(Onwuegbuzie & Denham, 2014, p. 2). A survey instrument was used to collect information on participant demographics additionally; individual participant interviews were

used to gather pertinent data relevant to academic and social development. The following ATC stakeholders were solicited to serve as study participants:

1. First gens exposed to and receiving targeted academic and social support programming offered at attending Albany Technical College.
2. Program administrators involved with offering targeted academic and social support programming to first gens attending Albany Technical College.

The quantitative aspect of the research captured responses given by students in the survey. The qualitative methodology approach captured the individual and collective responses of the participants as data in relation to the hypothesis. Questions posed during the interview provided insight into perspectives regarding targeted programming efforts specific to retention and graduation aspirations and outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

Table 1. Conceptual Framework		
Input	Process	Output
ATC's first generation students.	First gens' perceptions of academic and social programming received.	Evidence of academic and social programing efforts.
ATC's program administrators	Program administrators' perceptions of academic and social programming offered.	Evidence of academic and social programing efforts.
ATC first gens and program administrators .	Correlation of first gens and program administrators perceptions.	Evidence of success of academic and social programing efforts.

The Conceptual Framework Model outlined the input, process and output applicable to the examination of first gen students and program administrators' perspectives and the

correlation of perspectives, regarding academic and social development initiatives at Albany Technical College.

Significance of the study

Post- secondary institutions historically considered presence and sustainability through retention and graduation achievement of enrolled student populations. Institutions with high first gen populations often experienced low degree completion outcomes when challenges respective to this group were not assessed and addressed. Failure to address circumstances that influenced retention and graduation led to difficult sustainability of the impacted institutions.

Albany Technical College was an example of an institution that served an overwhelming number of under-served students. Under-served students were defined based on their experiences and conditions prior to their entry into colleges or by their racial or ethnic background. These experiences and influences influenced the level of success achieved within the post-secondary environment. The underserved demographic in the post- secondary environment was classified as one or more of the following: low income students, first generation students, non-traditional, disabled, minority backgrounds, non-native English speaking, having dependent children, single parents, having earned a high school equivalency diploma, financially independent from parents, students of color, and academically underprepared (Lieberman, 2016).

If a student was classified with more than one of the identifying designations, associated challenges exacerbated current or future retention and graduation efforts, impacting both students and the serving institutions. For example, recent data at a south Georgia university reflected a graduation rate of 39.6% (within 4-6 years) in comparison to the national average of 49% (within

4-6 years). Difficulties with completion manifested early with the underserved student demographic resulting in many not returning after their first year.

Over the last decade, colleges and universities were under intense examination. Failing to produce graduates possessing skills and expertise directed the ways in which industries were able to contribute and lead various societal markets. Dwindling populations, fewer jobs that requiring bachelor's degrees with the exception of the STEM and health care professions, contributed to an exodus of students moving beyond the region post- graduation, impacting the economic stability of the southwest Georgia region.

With state public post- secondary institutions receiving a portion if not the majority of funding from appropriations and revenue generated from tuition revenue, declining enrollment affected the allocation of funding as they were interdependent. First gens, a sub set population of the underserved student demographic comprised a significant number of students entering and matriculating to public two and four year institutions within the southwest region of Georgia. If the leading challenges were retention and graduation, examining the perceptions of first generation students and program administrators about retention and graduation efforts might improve first gen outcomes.

Targeted beneficiaries included institutions that admitted first gens, higher -ed practitioners that engaged first gens and researchers who study the academic and social success of this demographic in post -secondary education. The uniqueness of the study was it was based on the examination of diverging and correlating views of study participants that received targeted academic and social support programming and the administrators that designed and facilitated the programming that served a large number of first gens. Data collected support the purpose of

assessing the services offered at Albany Technical College based on the perspectives of the stakeholders involved.

Limitations and Delimitations

The study was limited to Albany Technical College's first generation students and program administrators. Perceptions based on experiences within the environment reflected a negative bias. As a result, the potential for accuracy of program(s) success and intended effectiveness might be diminished or reflect a bias based on survey comments. Other limitations included only assessing or examining the views and perspectives of ATC's first gens and program administrators without the comparison of equal counterparts at comparable institutions.

Delimitations entailed the researcher's access to other public post- secondary institutions heavily populated with matriculating first gens and familiarity with the challenges experienced by the demographic. In addition, the researcher had access to higher education colleagues who engaged with first gens that actively participated in targeted programming and those first gens who had not participated in targeted programming.

Definition of Terms

First generation student(s) - a population of students whose parents did not attend or earn a college degree (Banks-Santilli, 2015). The first generation student was also recognized or classified as a sub-set of the under-served population of students that attended post-secondary systems. This group was identified due to inequitable allocation of resources when compared to other student groups within the academic pipeline. In addition, this group represented low income, underrepresented, racial/ethnic minorities and first generations students.

Social integration - considered the first gens ability to assimilate or incorporate into the collegiate mainstream (Dictionary of Sociology, 2017). Just as social integration factored into the success of the first gen, academic under-preparedness influences retention and graduation. It was a demonstration of a student's academic skill sets that supported college readiness identified prior to admissions or withstand academic rigor throughout matriculation (Halajian, 2014).

Descriptive study- a methodology approach commonly used in qualitative research to describe characteristics associated to a phenomenon or a population. The application of this format of study focuses on the "what" of the characteristics as opposed to discovery of why the characteristics occurred or happened. The approach or method expanded understanding of the population or phenomenon subject of study (Shields, Hassan, 2006).

Targeted programming- planned activities or systems that served specific student populations enhancing experiences and development with a collegiate setting. Activities and methods applied were designed to integrate students academically and socially into the college or university (Winograd & Rust, 2014).

Assumptions

Major assumptions associated with first generation students:

- Low socioeconomic backgrounds
- Academically underprepared impacting the ability to sustain the rigors of a collegiate environment
- Lacked critical thinking skills
- Challenged with socially integrating post- secondary environments
- Lacked the social capital that supports college navigation and understanding (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt & Leonard, 2007).

Summary

If institutional viability and sustainability were tied to enrollment, retention and graduation outcomes, the need to consider and address challenges that influenced success needed to be considered. Based on literature, certain student demographics had a greater impact on retention and graduation success than others. The level of achieved success directly factored into funding allocation and support, reputation and enrollment growth potential. As admitted students matriculated for the purpose of degree attainment, academic preparedness and social integration heavily factored into overall success. Institutions admitting students challenged with academic preparedness and or social acclimation needed to consider the implementation of methods and systems in the form of targeted programming that countered and diminished identified challenges. Targeted programming was designed to increase the retention and graduation success of the targeted student demographic as well as the institution they attended. The researcher examined the targeted academic and social support systems based on perspectives of the study participants at Albany Technical College. The research design used to collect and assess programming was a mixed- methods design. The study findings contributed to the body of thought and information regarding programming efforts and the influence on retention and graduation of first gens.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The fulfillment of a college or university's mission underscored the importance of the successful recruitment, retention and graduation of students. Successful recruitment, retention and graduation impacted academic institutions' ability to successfully compete and maintain a viable presence within the world of post-secondary education (Atherton, 2014). Student experiences, backgrounds, exposure and understanding of college prior to entry also factored into a college or university's viability. However, there was evidence that certain student populations had a greater influence on the successful viability of an institution. First generation (first gen) students represented a significant number of the underserved student population. This group's exhibited characteristics and challenges not only impacted institutions' viability, but also the ability to successfully retain and graduate students Applicable student characteristics included but were not limited to the following: race, gender, socioeconomic status, full or part-time status, international classification, traditional and non-traditional, undergraduate and graduate, and first gens (Petty, 2014). Magnan, (2015) reported causes of low retention and graduation of the first gen demographic were extensive and in some instances, challenges students faced were difficult to overcome. Some of the most common issues associated with the population included but were not limited to:

1. Difficulty acclimating academically and socially to the college environment
2. Lack of familial support and college educated role models
3. Limited understanding of the college experience
4. Transportation and accessibility to campus
5. Meeting tuition cost (Magnan, 2015, p. 4).

Characteristics and challenges associated with first gens not only factored into degree completion efforts but impacted institutions beyond the scope of retention and graduation

(Magnan, 2015). For example, low retention and graduation of students influenced an institution's reputation and ability to fiscally sustain. Many institutions existed and thrived based on funding support tied to the admission of new students and overall retention.

Public four year colleges and universities often educated the largest population of first generation students. Near (1.7 million) first gens attended public institutions in comparison to 623,000 first gens that attended private nonprofit institutions in 2014 (Pappano, 2015). Public intuitions struggled with issues specific to this demographic at a greater level than private institutions. Regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status (SES), first gens dealt with one or more challenges during matriculation. Improvement or the elimination of the challenge(s) occurred when institutions aided the demographic with targeted academic and or social support programing (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014).

Targeted support systems not only improved the conditions and circumstances associated with students' matriculation and graduation, but improved overall retention and graduation respective to the institution (Atherton, 2014). Albany Technical College was an example of institution that implemented a targeted support system that impacted the majority of students enrolled - the first gen demographic (ATC'STARS, 2014). The STARS program provided ongoing academic and social support facilitated by program administrators identified as retention specialists. The institution attributed the institution's overall retention and degree completion successes to the program success.

Greenwald (2012) reported that some student groups had lower rates of matriculation and degree completion success than others. In Greenwald's study, emphasis was placed on the integral roles in which institutions factored into student outcomes. In particular, high numbers of

first gens were among the populations that experienced diminished success due to challenges associated with low academic performance and achievement prior to and throughout college, limited to no preparation for college entrance examinations or having the opportunity to partake in college tours or engagement prior to admission (Greenwald, 2012). These characteristics caused disparities that led to diminished success for this student population. Institutions with high underserved populations marked lower completion rates when compared to other student groups. In fact, one in six freshmen that attended a four- year college was a member of the first gen population that did not continue beyond their first year (Greenwald, 2012).

As a result of the significant disparities and low completion rates many colleges and universities intentionally developed and implemented recruitment and retention strategies for the purpose of improving outcomes (Dumas, & Ward, 2010). Failure to complete post-secondary pursuits diminished career opportunities and increased earning potential. Low retention and graduation of first gens not only effected the populations outcomes but impacted an institutions reputation, and funding support (Johnson, 2016). On a grander scale, the global knowledge economy was also impacted (Smith, 2015). In order for markets to remain competitive a workforce comprised of skilled college graduates capable of meeting respective market and industry demands (Smith, 2015).

The landscape of higher education in the United States changed significantly over the last few decades (Banks-Santilli, 2012). Since 2008 and 2009, enrollment trends in higher education significantly changed. The economy improved, job opportunities increased while federal and state funding that supported student tuition needs simultaneously diminished (Banks-Santilli,2012). Throughout this timeframe, competition among profits and not for profit post - secondary institutions increased access and caused institutions to rethink recruitment, retention

and graduation strategies for the various segments of student populations (Bank-Santilli, 2012).

Young (2016) reported that as the economy improved the demand for college degrees declined. Despite low enrollment declines, public access and not-for profit institutions continued to attract and admit high numbers of under-served, first gen populations (Young, 2016). This caused higher education practitioners to rethink and retool strategies that impacted successful retention and graduation of this student group despite the change in funding support (Magnan, 2015).

History

First generation students remained a unique demographic of college students within the world of higher education due to academic experiences and social backgrounds. Historically, first generation students (first gens) were defined as students whose parents never completed educational programming that yielded a minimum baccalaureate degree, or one whose parents never attended a college or university (Choy, 2011). The way in which institutions defined first gens was relatively consistent throughout post- secondary education; however, challenges and issues identified the groups retention and graduation success varied, based on the institution (Choy, 2011).

Access and public four year colleges and universities educated the largest population of first gens. Almost 1.7 million first gens attended public institutions in comparison to 623,000 first gens that attended private nonprofit institutions (Pappano, 2015). Public intuitions in particular struggled with retention and graduating at a greater level than private institutions. Regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, first generation students experienced one or more associated issue or challenge. However, when institutions decided to implement systems

to counter, identified issues diminished and student success improved (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Tucker (2014) also reported when institutions provided programming to students who historically encountered academic and social difficulties, the opportunities for successful matriculation and degree completion improved.

Academic Preparedness

Institutions that addressed academic deficiencies early in the matriculation of first gens improved retention and graduation outcomes (Carter, 2016). Sanacore and Palumbo (2015) reported that large numbers of first gens entered post-secondary environments lacking the core academic skill–sets. Academic histories and college placement exams provided insight into students' ability to handle rigorous coursework. Institutions knowingly admitted first gens with academic deficiencies but failed to provide services to correct and address the deficiencies (D'Amico & Dika, 2013).

Mangan (2014), and Sanacore and Palumbo (2015), suggested institutions failed first gens when students' academic under-preparedness was not considered at the point of recruitment and admission. Magnan (2015) affirmed the challenges introduced by Samacore and Palumbo (2015) and added, the reality was many institutions were ill-equipped to fully address the academic challenges first gens experienced post college admission due to limited financial and personnel resources.

Hansen, Trujilo, Boland and MacKinnon (2014) explained that funding to support academic services should be derived from a portion of student tuition. Applied funds could improve academic outcomes for the challenged demographic. Aware that fiscal limitations impeded the implementation of needed academic support programming, many states targeted the

post-secondary academic development and advancement of first generation students. For example, the state of Texas earmarked funding in the form of sub-grants designed to increase academic for first gens that attended state colleges and universities (Engle, Bermeo & O'Brien 2006). Colleges and universities provided college prep workshops to local area high schools with low college admittance and high concentrations of first-gens. In addition, awardees were asked to develop academic and social support strategies designed to counter the four common hindrances that impact successful recruitment and matriculation:

1. Low levels of academic preparation
2. Low educational aspirations
3. Limited or no encouragement and support to attend college, particularly from parents
4. Less knowledge about the college application process (Engle, Bermeo & O'Brien, 2006).

Florida, Indiana and Texas were examples of states that addressed academic preparedness of first gens prior to entry into college. Savits-Romer and Jager-Hyman (2014) highlighted the aforementioned states for pre-college outreach programs efforts. The *Access to Success* program, based in Indiana (Savits-Romer & Jager-Hyman (2014). Mentors were matched with first gen students and provided support in and instruction in areas of note-taking, study skills and time management strategies. The outreach program increased retention and graduation rates of first gens impacted by identified variables and paradigms that impeded college success (Savits-Romer & Jager-Hyman, 2014).

Callahan (2009) presented research that supported the role and influence of academic-centered peer interactions to overall academic success. The author espoused that peer interactions based on academic pursuits not only advanced socialization, but contributed to

students' cognitive development and self- esteem. Similarly, Scott and Hemant (2007) suggested peer academic engagement benefited social integration through professional mentorship programs. In addition to Callahan's (2009) peer-to-peer interaction, professional mentorship programs linked students to a network of professional leaders external to the college.

As a result of mentor/mentee programs at the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM), participants improved in areas of academic and professional development resulting in increased retention of first gens, and adult students of color. In comparison, Ulloa and Herra (2006) pointed out Arizona State University's (ASU) mentorship program and the correlation to students' academic success. The ASU's Multicultural Student Center for mentoring established peer-to-peer relationships through professional development workshops. Students were matched with peer students of color who were academically challenged to students excelling academically. The project yielded a reduced attrition and improved the academic success of the first gens previously identified with academic deficiencies.

Social Integration

Tinto (1999), reported the importance and value of social integration. First gens oftentimes lacked consistent college graduate role models or exposure to a higher education environment. Because of this reality many, a first gens socialization and acclimation into a college environment proved difficult. In order to address the issue of social integration, Tinto expressed the value of first gens establishing cohesive relationships early on with faculty, and staff. Similarly, Harper and Quay (2009) posited the importance of student engagement. For example, when students interacted beyond classroom instruction they experienced a greater connection to the institution. Interaction with peers through student based programming

advanced assimilation into the collegiate environment.

Sanancora and Palumbo (2015) described first gen student, Tae-Hyun Sakong who suffered from anxiety and depression as result of comparing himself to his non-first gen peers. Drastic differences in economic status, coupled with his parents' limited education and inability to speak English, taxed Sakong's college experience. Sakong reported that if it were not for the guidance and interaction with his advisor and biology professor, he would have dropped out of college. Sakong attended Trinity University, an institution known for its focus on the retention of first gens.

Barbaris (2010), and Harper and Quaye (2009), explained that student, faculty and staff pipelines were critical to first gens social integration and benefited a student's overall experience. When institutions intentionally took steps to improve the social engagement and integration of first gens, students of diverse racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds, retention and graduation rates increased (Olson, 2014).

Dynarski (2016) echoed the importance of student and faculty engagement by promoting the benefits of continuous one-on-one faculty mentoring. Faculty mentoring and engagement beyond classroom instruction filled the gap left by families of first gens who lacked the understanding of the intricacies and various aspects of college. Support and guidance in the areas that impacted the ability to successfully compete during and beyond college came from those with first-hand knowledge and understanding, thus affirming the need for greater involvement from faculty to also served as mentors (Coleman, 2014).

The holistic approach to addressing the barriers of first gens attending college was also affirmed by Shackner (2015). Despite increased opportunities and accessibility to college, first

gens faced a set of social challenges and experiences that impeded or derailed success. Lack of familiarity with the college experiences triggered feelings of insecurity, diminished confidence in one's ability and created feelings that one was an "imposter". Shackner, who graduated from Cornell University, shared a firsthand analysis offering his personal knowledge as a first generation student of the 1970s. He shared the social toll experienced to pursing a degree as first generation student. Now a lawyer and venture capital investor, Shackner noted he was sieged with thoughts of being exposed as an imposter who would be discovered and eventually expelled. Despite the absence of the common challenge many first gens encountered, college affordability, Shackner endured other common challenges. Financing a college education was one barrier while lacking social or cultural capital were equally significant, influencing one's ability to succeed. Being able to identify with those of similar backgrounds aided social transition and engagement into college (Shackner, 2015).

The University of Detroit Mercy encouraged first gens to share experiences through a video format, regardless their faculty, staff or student classification. The "*I'm First*" initiative was showcased on the institution's website and viewed nationwide by perspective first gens. The video collection included a message from the school's provost who also identified as once being first gen (Shackner, 2015). The "*I'm First*" initiative enhanced social acclimation for this demographic.

Vance (2016) shared with readers his experience regarding the intangible barriers that influenced his matriculation as a first generation student. Just as attorney, Shackner (2015) wrestled with feelings of being viewed as an imposter, Vance experienced a very similar experience (Johnson, 2016). Vance's invisible barriers as first generation manifested with his

difficulty to navigate bureaucratic obstacles (p. 3). For example, Vance (2016) noted that intuitions identified students with access to contacts that yielded internships, and recommendations that led to career opportunities. Non- first gens and wealthy students often had direct access to the accommodations and hailed from an environment where access and use of accommodations were normalized. Vance shared that his success and ability to learn the systems and processes that dismantled such barriers were the result of mentors (Johnson, 2016).

Exposure to college prior to admission

Researchers and higher education practitioners identified how limited college exposure prior to admission influenced retention and degree completion for first gens throughout higher education systems (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). When limited understanding and parental guidance was lacking, Ward et al. suggested the need and importance for college recruiters, higher-education and K-12 system practitioners to work in concert to educate prospective students about college expectations and processes. The development and implementation of systems that educated first gen students about the importance of being academically prepared and the college selection process served to the advantage of the first gen and the institution attended (p. 32).

Dynarski (2016) highlighted the normalization of the college experience within the homes of students whose parents earned college degrees (Foster, 2015). Well versed parents and college advisors aided a student in navigating the college process and experience. First gens who had access to those well versed about the college experience might be unfamiliar or particularly challenged with the bureaucracy associated with applying for financial aid, enrolling in college, and waiting lists for courses. Riggs (2014) addressed the importance and value of exposure as

well as intentional engagement and guidance with this demographic. Brasenberer & Brian (2013) shared the importance of administrators, faculty and staff working in concert to engage first gens challenged with social integration. Addressing socialization issues and barriers at the onset of college matriculation minimized the first gens' difficulty with transitioning into the environment. Involving current students, faculty and staff not only benefited the recruitment process, but the retention of students. Contributions from each of the respective areas that influenced inclusion from the onset introduced and prepared students for experiences relative to their intended academic program as well as the institution as a whole.

Direct and consistent exposure to individuals that successfully pursued and or completed a college degree, benefited social integration and increased overall opportunities for success (Gose, 2014). Consistent exposure and engagement to role models or individuals who attended college or universities improved understanding of the admissions process, degree selection and the navigation of college process and experience (Foster, 2015). Because first gens often lacked the guidance of college experienced parents, role models filled the void by offering insight into the various aspects and navigate of processes (Cardoza, 2016). This supported the need for established programs on campuses nationwide, leveling the field for first gens to adjust to the social environment despite backgrounds (Coleman, 2014).

Tucker (2014) affirmed Vance's (2016) assessment of non-first gens access to opportunities in comparison to first gens. Wealthy parents of non-first gens began preparing their children for the college experience prior to admission. With the assistance of personal admission counselors, standardized test preparation and college selection through touring, this demographic had a greater advantage over their first gen counterparts.

Cardoza (2016) presented the story of Christopher Feaster, an African American first gen who attended Michigan State (MSU), who faced challenges with social integration. Feaster noted that barriers experienced were rooted in the vast difference of his background compared to his life as a MSU student. Prior to matriculating college, he faced the reality of not having enough food to eat at home. He then transitioned to the dilemma of selecting and deciding from a 16 item breakfast cereal menu offered by school cafeteria, daily. He expressed that the experience of adjusting socially was huge and included pains of guilt as his degree pursuit hindered his immediate ability to support his mother who was at home struggling to meet basic housing and utility needs (Cardoza, 2016).

Unlike, former MSU student, Feaster, Shackner (2015) overcame the challenges of adjusting and ultimately graduated from Cornell and became an attorney. In contrast, Feaster fell into a state of depression, failed his courses, left and never returned to MSU. After leaving MSU, Feaster transitioned into a service industry positon. Fulltime roles were difficult to secure and the idea of returning to college caused concern as he was “afraid of of falling behind (p. 4).”

Kluczkowski (2014), reported the benefits of having mentors and interaction and first gens. Having observed many first gens lacked the understanding of the protocol needed to address instructors, one faculty member intentionally educated beyond the outlined lesson of course instruction. The instructor mentored students on the rules of engagement when communicating with professors via email. Kluczkowski (2014), also reported about one first gen’s appreciation for the value of the lesson, with the student reporting that no one ever took the time to explain the importance of effective email communication.

As a result of limited guidance many first gens gave up shortly after engaging in the post-secondary pursuit. Kluczkowski (2014) recalled personal challenges navigating and processes, despite being knowledge and experienced. Kluczkowski (2014) decided to parlay her personal college experience to her daughter's educational experience by guiding the admissions and financial aid processes.

Lightens (2014), noted compassion, dignity and concern for students were equally as important as to creation and implementation of support based programs. These actions were not exclusive to the mentor being directly involved with the students, but should be reflected throughout the institution's culture (Stephens, Frybert, Markus, Johnson & Corvarrubias, 2012).

Non-first gens had the privilege of being exposed to college, associated benefits as early as birth. Shackner (2015) shared the following differentials regarding exposure and privilege. Seventy- five percent of non- first gen wealthy students graduated with a bachelor's degree before the age of 24. In comparison, non-wealthy first gens graduated at a rate of 9 or 10% before the age of 24. Shackner noted the benefits of early college exposure manifested in many forms. The author and University of Pittsburg advisor regularly engaged with first gens and observed shared about limited understanding of the college process. This lack of understanding often determined if a student completed a degree. For example, one of his advisees was prevented from registering for classes because of an unpaid tuition balance that totaled thousands of dollars. After investigating it was determined the student failed to complete the required promissory note associated with his financial aid package. Once signed and processed, the balance and amount owed was reduced to $6.00. Had guidance not been available which

included an education on the various aspects of college financial aid, the student might have given up all together (Shackner, 2015).

Similarly, Cardoza, (2012) shared the importance of early exposure to college processes and expectations prior to student's entry into the 9th grade and depending on students' socioeconomic status as early as 7th grade. Cardoza (2012) reflected that differences of socioeconomic status (SES) translated into a student's preparation for college, commitment, persistence and drive to complete a degree if college became an aspirational goal or option. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were impacted at greater levels by the commonly known challenges. Despite the socioeconomic variable, parental encouragement was a key influencer regardless the socioeconomics in addition to academic preparation in high school, exposure to the college experience and affordability (p. 41).

Ward, Michael, Siegel and Davenport (2012) affirmed Cardoza's (2016) research of college exposure prior to admission and how parental influence guided the first gen's ability to complete college. The federal funded TRIO program was used as an example to support the belief. The TRIO program was designed to address the needs of disadvantaged student groups including first gens who had limited exposure to college prior to entry. TRIO programming involved academic and social engagement (Ward, Michael, Siegel & Davenport, 2012). Targeted TRIO programming increased levels of academic achievement and the social integration of first gens at post-secondary institutions that that ranged from the Ivy League and community colleges (Soria & Stebeleton, 2012).

The federally funded Move On When Ready (MOWR) program was designed in 2002 and exposed students to college prior to high school completion. With more than 230 program

affiliates functioning at various higher education institutions across the country, the TRIO initiative created pathways for high school students to gain college experience and earn credits while simultaneously completing high school (Ndiaye &Wolfe, 2016). By the time students entered college, post high school, they possessed an understanding of college functions and operations. Twenty-two percent of first gens that participated in MOWR, earned a college degree in comparison to 2% of first gens who did not participate in the program (Forbus, Newbold & Mehta, 2011). MOWR students gained strategies and techniques, specific to problem solving, persistence and readiness. These skills positioned first gens for greater success in comparison to non- first gens entering without prior college exposure (Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2016).

Padgett, Johnson and Pascarella (2012) offered research on the important role of retention specialists to underserved first gens. Researchers shared strategic systems used at Winston Salem State University and Wheaton College. Both institutions employed retention specialists to monitor the academic progress of first gens with the use of an early warning system. The system alerted retention specialists of students' academic progress and related issues that placed students at risk for successful completion. In addition to early warning systems, other institutional practices included review of students' academic backgrounds and socioeconomic status, which benefited academic and social navigation efforts.

First gens did not always have an understanding of the purpose of support services or the roles of the college program administrator within college. Issues of academic preparedness, college affordability and social adjustment were less daunting when the guidance of advisors was made available. Riggs (2014) concluded when compared to non-first gen peers, first gens

carried added burdens of financial debt and often required academic remediation, which further exacerbating other challenges. The matter of academic under-preparedness was complicated when schools failed to offer personnel to support first gens. More often than not, a first gens decision to discontinue academic pursuits was not always based on academic abilities but the lack of information and guidance (Riggs, 2014).

Retention specialists taught students to speak the language of higher education and the associated processes. Hope (2016) reported, first gens were educated about the benefits from accessing retention specialists, advisors, writing and math lab services, academic development and degree attainment increased.

Cost of educating first gens

First gens encountered financial issues that impacted the demographics' success. Data from the American Association of Community Colleges reflected public and community colleges admitted over half of all undergraduate students; the majority were first gens (Ward, Siegel & Davenport, 2012). Many first gens entered college unable to afford the cost of tuition. Financial concerns exacerbated other problems influencing successful outcomes for first gens (Ward, Siegel & Davenport, 2012).

Dynarski (2016) studied the issue of retention and graduation and noted over half of students who enrolled in college dropped out the first year of college. Outcomes included acute financial burdens on the demographic in the form of accrued loan debt, with the added reality of not having earned a college degree. Further, 30% of first gens dropped out of school within the first three years of degree pursuit. This was triple the number when compared to students whose parents graduated from college.

Similarly, Sanacore and Palumbo (2015) noted the burden of college affordability should be shared. College administrators knowingly admitted first gens challenged with the inability to address the cost of tuition. As it related to first gens, challenges led to the first gens' failure to complete the first year of college as they were unable to afford to continue (Antwell, Heil, & Reisel, 2011).

Wildhagen (2015) reported college administrators needed to bear some of the financial burden educating first gens. Aware of the financial challenges first gens faced, a portion of college revenue could be designated to fund tuition support efforts as well as academic and social integration programming. Although federal funding was available to support the underserved, failure to adhere to federally established criteria regarding successful retention and graduation determined allocation amounts and continuance for students and institutions (Crisp, Taggart & Nora, 2015).

Despite financial issues, some two -year and four -year institutions identified resources to eliminate barriers that impeded academic success and social integration of first gens pre and post college admission (Antweel, Hull & Reisel, 2011). Through partnerships with high schools and higher- education institutions experienced recruitment and retention success with "College Prep Day" initiatives (Perry, 2014). This initiative targeted middle and high school students. Participants were engaged in an abbreviated college experience through workshops, student panel discussions and campus tours. The University of Maryland offered a three- day version of the College Prep Day to potential high school students. Participants not only engaged in the college pre day activities, but had the opportunity to live in the residence halls and attend classes (Brasenbeger & Brian, 2013).

Factors of socioeconomic status and race

Education improved a student's socioeconomic status and mobility regardless of race and ethnicity. Gibbons, Woodside, (2014) reported degree obtainment increased financial stability. The benefits of earning a college degree were particularly relevant for historically underserved students, such as first-generation, low-income, and racial/ethnic minority students, given America's drive and commitment to economic and social mobility. In 2010, more than 4.5 million low-income, first-generation students enrolled in postsecondary institutions – approximately 24 percent of the overall undergraduate population (Richardson & Fisk-Skinner, 2012).

Carlson (2016), discussed the realities of being a first gen of low-socioeconomic status within the post-secondary environment. Meeting the demands of tuition and fees while simultaneously experiencing the sudden cost of transportation repairs and health/medical costs caused students to drop out of school (Lieberman, 2016). This was irrespective of living costs such as rent, food and childcare. Transportation issues and health issues caused students in a low income brackets to drop out of school. Living expenses on average exceeded 70 percent of the total cost to attend a two- year college (p 5). A student's access to financial resources impacted ability to enter and successfully complete college. Low socioeconomic status impeded the ability to successfully integrate and advance into college and further impacted the student's ability to escape the boundaries and limitations applicable to the status (Martin, 2015). Low socioeconomic status first gens were often forced to work full or part-time while pursuing a college education (Shackner, 2015). Riggs (2014) reported that 11% of low income first gens earned a college degree within six years, two years more than the traditional four- year timeline.

Mathewson (2016) offered a historical account of race and the large number of first gens of color academically under prepared to manage the rigors of college course work. This greatly impacted retention and graduation for both the student and the institution attended. Mathewson (2016) and Riggs (2014) reported race added to the complexity of a first gen's experience. In addition to academic under-preparedness, limited or non-existent college socialization, coupled with experiences of racial bias further stressed the first gen, student of color's ability to achieve the level of academic success that would result in degree attainment (Mathewson, 2016). Belmont University's first gen and full scholarship awardee, LaTrya Gordon, socially struggled with being one of few blacks at a predominately white institution. This challenge coupled with being academically unprepared to handle the academic rigor hindered Gordon's progress; however, Gordon attributed her overall success to the support received through targeted programs (Riggs, 2014).

Squire (2013), reported the intersection of race, socio-economic status, and first gen status were central components of student academic and social development. Issues related to these factors should not be decentralized but considered as a part of an institution's collective sum. When all were considered, conditions and circumstances affecting the demographics' success improved.

Post- secondary institution targeted programming

Cardoza (2016) highlighted the need for targeted programming. Cardoza (2016) explained the importance of institutions deliberately countering the barriers first gens faced. For instance, students lacked understanding about the purpose of "office hours" viewed the service negatively. Instead of interpreting office hours as a form of supplemental instruction, office

hours were instead viewed as a negative connation of poor academic performance. Vassar College harnessed control over identified issues by matching underrepresented students with mentors. In addition, students were invited to attend orientation sessions prior to the commencement of school allowing them time to learn of campus resources as well as bond with their assigned mentor (Cardoza, 2016).

Brown University was also recognized for its intentional targeted programming. Originated at Brown, the *1vgG* was a network of first generation college students whose focus was to increase awareness about the challenges the demographic faced. This network spanned the entire Ivy League institution network. Activities included mentorship and a textbook donation service (Cardoza, 2015).

George E. Martin (2016) of St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas, explained the benefits of faculty and staff working in concert in order to improve recruitment, retention and graduation of first gens. The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and the Mundy Scholars, both modeled after concepts developed by researcher Richard Skinner (2001), increased the retention of first gens and caused an influx of new first gen recruits (Brown & Santiago, 2016). CAMP was 40-year old financial assistance program that assisted students who were children of migrant workers. The Mundy Scholars provided scholarship assistance to academically talented students. These programs helped to alleviate the one issue so many first gen students encountered, the financial cost of attending college. In addition, the institutions hired retention specialists dedicated specifically to this demographic. The program's success yielded both increased retention, and expanded potential student interest due to word of mouth throughout neighboring communities (p. 3). The success of the programs and institution expanded the thought that collective effort and the consideration of socioeconomic status in

relationship to students' ability to excel in collegiate environments, improved opportunities for both students and institutions.

Carlson (2016) highlighted work of the Lumina Foundation's desire to lessen the economic pressures for this demographic. The Lumina Foundation was a private enterprise committed to the support student's degree completion through funding and public policy design and implementation. For example, Georgia State University supported students challenged with financial hardships through funding received by the Lumina Foundation. Lumina awarded mini grants in the amount of $900.00 The support benefited over 7000 students attending participating colleges and universities. Grant dollars addressed non-academic costs incurred that otherwise were not met as state funding for students had to exclusively be used for tuition costs (Supiano, 2016).

Supiano (2016) wrote of the experiences of first gens that were products of disadvantaged backgrounds attending elite and or private colleges and universities. Although the population numbers of first gens were often much smaller when compared to populations at larger public institutions, the challenges experienced were similar, if not exact. Of the particular challenges noted, was difficulties with socially adjusting to the collegiate environment as well as experiencing a sense of not belonging that ranked as the top two leading challenges for first gens attending elite institutions.

First gens interviewed at Princeton expressed the difference in social backgrounds impacted their ability to adapt to the campus culture and environment (Foster, 2015). For example, students from privileged backgrounds vacationed regularly or frequently dined at eating clubs. In comparison, first generation students of lower incomes had access to dining halls

or cook for themselves. Experiences impacted by socioeconomic differences influenced socialization. Princeton, viewed as an elite institution, developed implemented the Freshman Scholars Institute to assist first gens and other underserved students with socially adapting to the campus environment (p. 23).

Due to low matriculation and completion numbers, the University of Pittsburg took a proactive approach to addressing issues by implementing a system that connected and expanded communication to the demographic via text messaging. Students received reminders regarding the completion of re-enrollment, registration and financial aid. Program outcomes included a 68 percent increase in the number of first gen freshmen that successfully transitioned to their sophomore year as compared to 54% of those first gen freshmen who had not received the text message communications (Dynarski, 2016).

Mathewson (2016) reflected effective communication improved retention of first gens as well as other under-represented groups attending college. Based on survey results, Mathewson (2016) supported Dynarski's (2016) assertion that text messaging was viewed and received as a first gens' preferred option when receiving critical information from the college or university they attended.

Like Dynarksi (2016), Opidee (2015) studied institutions that intentionally targeted the retention of first generation students. Opidee (2015) reported on Metropolitan State University's attempt to address the needs first gen students attending. The institution devoted a 145, 000 sq. ft. building to student success. A one-stop shop of advising, registration, tutoring, and financial operations were housed under one roof. Academic advisement and the various aspects of

student life were tailored to meet the needs of the first gen population. In addition to the academic advisement, career planning and professional development was made available.

Opidee (2015) cited Fox Valley Technical College in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, as another example. The campus of Fox Valley Technical College housed a two-story 24,500 sq. ft. student success center. The center was replete with computer labs, one on one and group tutoring areas. Opidee (2015) noted that full buy-in and support from all divisions and areas of the colleges aided the center's success and the students who supported what it offered. Fox Valley Technical College's student center initiative gained the support and buy-in of faculty. Selected faculty modified instruction in gateway courses for students who entered the institution academically under-prepared. After academic improvement, greater faculty buy-in occurred. The center now has over 100 faculty instructors who modified instruction or offered supplemental instruction in gateway courses such as Biology and Chemistry.

Opidee (2015) reported that the Bottom Line program supported the access and success of first generation college students within the state of Massachusetts and the cities of New York and Chicago. The program focused on transitioning first gens into the campus environment. Outcomes resulted in degree completion rate of 78% of participating first gens graduating from respective colleges and universities. This statistic exceeded the national average of students with the first gen classification with similar academic and socio-economic backgrounds.

Opidee (2015) analyzed data associated with first gens utilizing services at the University of South Carolina. The population studied was exclusive to the institution's full service Student Center and retention graduation programs. Outcomes resulted in an increase of retention rate of 5

to 6 percent higher than non-first gens. In addition, of those the students that utilized the center during 2013-14 their gap was or exceeded 30% (Opidee, 2015).

Tucker (2014) reported about a series of institutions that established targeted programming for first gens. Programs included the following institutions:

1. Norfolk State University S.P.A.R.C. (Spartans Preparing for Academic Rigor in College) instituted a summer bridge program that transitioned incoming freshmen from high school to the college experience.
2. Kenyon College's KEEP (Kenyon Educational Enrichment Program engaged participants in writing development and data analysis coursework. Students were paired with faculty or administration mentors throughout their entire college experience.
3. Chief Dull Knife College created a multifaceted engagement program. Participating students interacted with faculty, received tutoring through computerized instruction as well as peer-to-peer interaction.
4. Morehouse College offered peer led instruction and tutoring for students pursuing science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) disciplines.
5. Claflin University's Learning in Communities for Success LinCs targeted program first gens enrolled in three team taught courses which encompassed college basics orientation, English 101, English composition and Math 111. First gens identified as at risk at the point of admission were encouraged to apply and participate.
6. Franklin and Marshall College hosted the three-week F&M College college prep program for high school seniors. Students completed a research project led by campus faculty. Data reflected the retention of first gens and low income students attending increased

from 14-21 percent within three years (Tucker, 2014). Hope (2016), Kruger (2016) and Kluczkowski (2014) espoused that when institutions directly interacted with first gens prior to class matriculation and throughout, improved academic success and students' ability to navigate systems and processes associated and degree attainment occurred in greater numbers.

Burns (2016) highlighted Georgia State and Michigan State universities' application of process mapping. Process mapping entailed outlining an organization's objectives in a format or map for the purpose of improving systems and processes (Burns). Assessments facilitated by both institutions yielded results that reflected first gens and low income students were overwhelmed by the volume of communications received via emails. Large volumes resulted in unread and deleted emails that contained essential information relevant to students' academic programming and support services (Burns, 2016). With the use of process mapping, both institutions developed and implemented measures that improved communication efforts. For example, at Michigan State communications from the offices of Financial Aid and Student Activities were streamlined with prioritization of financial aid notices. Prior to the implementation of the system, students who were placed on academic probation received over the same message from four different senders. After the change, students received only one communication outlining specific details of the academic status including options that supported the reversal of poor academic performance in addition academic and financial advisement (Burns, 2016).

Lieberman (2016) echoed Burns' (2016) analysis of systems that contributed to the success of first gens and underrepresented minorities through process mapping. In addition,

Liberman (2016) advocated a shift in the mindset of senior administration and faculty and how they viewed this population of students. Administrators and faculty at University of LaVerne, Stanford University, The University of California, Berkeley, and the University of California, Santa Barbara approached the barriers first gens faced from the lens of deficiency and lack of preparedness. All of the aforementioned higher education institutions had a high number of Latino, first generation students. Based on the 2015 *Excelencia in Education* report, all of the institutions reviewed successfully improved the numbers reflecting degree pursuit and attainment of this group through enrollment, retention and graduation initiatives (Liberman, 2016).

Cardoza's (2016) cited retention and graduation approaches used at Georgia's Kennesaw State and California's University of La Verne as examples of targeted programming in support of first gens. Kennesaw State University operated the Quest Learning Community providing first gen participants with customized, tailored support system emphasizing common and shared student college experiences. The University of La Verne partnered with Convergence, a local healthcare system, that provided employment opportunities to graduates from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds. The alliance also supported matriculating students by offering undergraduate research opportunities, positioning students to apply theory into skills and practice. The University of La Verne's partnership outcomes reflected an increase in graduation from 40 percent to 50 percent within a three-year time frame. Students within this demographic who graduated within a marked six years, increased from 59 percent to 64 percent (Cardoza, 2016).

Liberman (2016) stressed the importance of all-encompassing measures. To solely offer financial support in the form of scholarships did not independently increase the opportunities for first gens or underrepresented groups. The author and president of the University of La Verne in turn suggested a collective approach of academic enhancement, active involvement of both

university leadership and faculty and direct access to campus resources and support was what ensured student success (Liberman, 2016).

Liberman (2016) continued by highlighting another common challenge institutions encountered, the identification of first gens. Many colleges and universities relied on the self-identification regarding first gen status. In the past, institutions relied on U.S. Census Bureau to report this demographic; however, the Census Bureau ceased to track the education or degree attainment of parents. Institutions now rely on access systems such as the Common Application program. This system collected and tracked information associated with identification of student populations attending U.S. colleges and universities. In 2014, the Common Application program recorded more than 28% of the 800,000 students used the application instrument, which indicated if they were first generation students (Liberman, 2016).

In 2014, Smith College's first generation population totaled 17% of its student population (Foster, 2015). Faculty and staff, once identified as first gens while pursuing academic degrees, shared their status at an event sponsored for first gens. One of the many faculty/staff participants included college president, Kathleen McCartney. Foster (2015) also reported on other elite institutions like Amherst College and Harvard University that actively engaged with first generation students. Both Amherst and Harvard utilized the federal funded TRIO program. The TRIO program comprised outreach services that targeted low income students, a characteristic or identifier sometimes synonymous with first gen students. Services and program elements included but were not limited to academic coaching, tutoring, peer mentoring, financial literacy training and preparatory instruction for graduate school (Foster, 2015). Carter (2016) also highlighted the commitment of other Ivy League institutions to first gens. Yale University placed

their first gens in small cohorts with assigned counselors, created access to tutoring centers and a tailored summer orientation.

Like Yale and Harvard, Belmont University of Nashville, Tennessee provided mentoring to first gens through the Bridges to Belmont program. Similar to Riggs (2014), Foster (2015) studied the social challenges of being a first generation student attending elite colleges and universities and shared students' challenges with identifying with others from other socioeconomic experiences. Transitioning from impoverished backgrounds to engaging with peers who came from a world of privilege and influence heightened the reality of their limited social and cultural capital (Foster, 2015). Foster (2015) also cited other post-secondary institutions like City University of New York (CUNY)'s Accelerated Study in Associates and the Sunder Foundation's First Scholar. Both programs focused on the mentoring and coaching components as key to the retention and graduation of first generation students.

Magnan and Sander (2014) paralleled Cardoza (2016) explanation of Vassar's use of mentors with first gens. Like Vassar, Indiana State University adopted a similar mentoring model with the assistance of private companies that specialize in coaching. Professional coaches were linked to students crafting a system of support that met the student's specific needs. The review of the outcomes regarding student/coach interaction resulted in increased student motivation, improvements in student work life balance, enhanced social acclimation to the collegiate environment as well as improved navigation of the college terrain (Magnan & Sander, 2014). In a study facilitated by the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas Austin, researchers found students did not always take advantage of resources that supported academic development and advancement. In some cases, students

placed a stigma on the need for academic assistance, opting not to seek it at all. Magan & Sander (2014) expanded the thought by sharing coaching strategies were beneficial however other measures were also needed to effectively target the retention and graduation issues associated with first gens.

Florida State and Indiana State universities were examples of institutions that utilized coaching services to support first gens. The service provider, InsideTrak coached a population of 800,000 students attending over 100 campuses throughout the U.S. Based on assessments at each of the respective institutions, students coached were retained at a higher number than their low income or first generation counterparts who had not experienced coaching (Mangan, 2015).

In addition to mentors, matching first gen students with other first gens proved to be a success for students attending historically black, Howard University (Magnan, 2015). With the use of federal funding available through the TRIO program, first gens received added support based on identified needs. Many institutions used data analytics to assist with identification of those needs and determined appropriate intervention steps as well as student success measures (Magnan, 2015).

Brown & Santiago (2016) and Magnan (2015) discussed the benefits of analytics. Like Howard University, Santa Monica College used data analytics to assist its first gen, Hispanic student populations (Brown & Santiago, 2016). Brown and Santiago (2016) cited an example of first gen student, Jamie J, who struggled financially and was challenged academically in the area of math. Through the use of data analytics, it was determined Jamie J was a conscientious student with good study practices. With the assistance of a success coach, student Jamie J

corrected the math deficiency and graduated with a 3.2 grade point average (Brown & Santiago, 2016).

Success Navigator, an assessment software, provides data to institutions working to target first gen needs. Santa Monica College officials used the system to gain a holistic perspective of students' needs, challenges and hurdles that hindered success. This information was shared with students, instructors and advisors creating paths to campus resources that served and benefited student success (Brown & Santiago, 2016).

Cardoza (2016) showcased institutions that attempted to eliminate issues and barriers through the use of data analytic applications. One third of Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) student population was comprised of first gens. VCU studied the issue of low retention through data collection. Students were placed on academic warning, withdrawn from classes, failing to meet graduation credit requirements or at risk of dropping out were identified contacted by respective officials in order to implement an intervention plan. As a result, the university closed the graduation gap between first gens and non-first gens of various ethnic and racial backgrounds Cardoza (2016).

Work life balance was another common challenge first gens and non-traditional students' experienced (Brown and Santiago, 2016). Meeting the demands and responsibilities of balancing work, academic pursuits and family, created matriculation and graduation barriers. St. Augustine College located in Chicago, Illinois initiated a program that created pathways to completion for the Latino student population, many of which were of first generation status. In addition to creating a seamless transition from two year to four year academic programs to an accelerated

graduate programs within the social work discipline, the program offered support services like tutoring and child care (Brown and Santiago, 2016).

Review and assessments of institutions like St. Augustine, Northern Community College and George Mason University determined that holistic pathways diminished barriers that hindered college completion for Latinos and other demographics that experienced transitional adjustment and acclimation to the college environment (Brown &Santiago, 2016). In comparison, officials at University of Texas at El Paso took intentional actions and steps to improve opportunities for low income and first gen students. Serving a large population of Hispanic first generation students, associate provost, Donna Ekal (2016) emphasized many hurdles impeded student success. Affordability was a very common challenge many faced, causing students to decide between working and attending college. Through data mining, the institution worked to assess and determine other factors that derailed student success and implemented measures designed to improve graduation opportunities for all students (Brown & Santiago 2016). These measures and systems designed to eliminate barriers impacting retention and graduation success not only benefited the student population, but the institutions they attended. Assessments and tailored applications included mentoring, coaching, student success centers, early warning systems and data analytics influenced academic development and social acclimation.

First gens shared common experiences regardless of race, gender, international, traditional, non-traditional, undergraduate, graduate classification or socioeconomic, full, or part-time status. The type of institution the population of students attended did not alter or diminish the level of challenges experienced. Regardless, public, private, Ivy League or elite, first gens identified

similar if not exact challenges. Intentional programming, directed funding and uniformed approaches administered by colleges or universities improved overall opportunities for the demographic and institution.

Table 2. Studies related first generation students attending post-secondary institutions

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Harding, Parker & Toutkoushian (2015)	Determine the level of academic college preparation prior to admission	First gen and non- first generation college students	Qualitative Survey	89% of non-first gens studied were more likely to take college preparatory classes than their first gen counterpart. Non-firsts with one or more parent having a PhD attended grad school in higher numbers.
Paulesen & St. John(1997)	Social histories and psychodynamics of families and the impact on matriculation success of first gens	First gen college students and the level of persistence from first year to second year	Qualitative Survey	82.2% of students transitioned to their second year with the support of Student Affairs officials and intentional programming.

McKay and Estrella (2008)	Analyzed social and academic integration success methods associated with drop- out rate	High school students with plans to transition into college as a first gen	Quantitative review- measurement of high school grades	72% spent less time preparing academically in order to support parental and family needs.
Stephens (2012)	Reviewed and the social norms perpetuated by colleges and universities	50 administrators at American universities and 25 administrators colleges	Qualitative Survey	84% viewed the achievement of student success through personal choice and development.

Summary

Researchers reporting on the admission, retention and graduation of first generation students concluded that certain barriers influenced academic and social integration success. Common challenges included a student's academic preparedness prior to college admission, social integration, tuition and over all college affordability, socioeconomic status and race. Based on the challenges experienced by first gens and the institutions that they attended, these challenges were consistent, yielding diminished retention and graduation specific to the demographic. Researchers reported that intentional and targeted programing coupled with data analytics, countered the negative impact of barriers that impeded success in the areas of impacting completion outcomes.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Post- secondary institutions across the higher education spectrum engaged students from varied and diverse educational and social backgrounds. The academic and social experiences of students entering, matriculating and graduating from these institutions influenced outcomes for students as well as the institution. Researchers indicated that some student demographics fared better than others in degree pursuits and attainment. Identified challenges of academic preparedness, social adaption and limited prior exposure to the college experience had greater negative influences on certain student populations than others, in particular, first generation students (Cardoza, 2016).

Under-served students were defined according to academic and social experiences or by racial or ethnic backgrounds. Engle & Tinto, (1999) expanded the definition as low income students, first generation students, non-traditional, disabled, come from minority backgrounds, non-native English speaking, having dependent children, single parents, having earned a high school equivalency diploma and financially independent from parents, students of color and academically underprepared. First generation (first gen) students comprised one of the largest segments of the under-served student population attending post- secondary institutions and experienced a unique set of challenges impacting overall success (Duke, 2017).

Post-secondary institutions defined the first gens according to educational attainment of the demographics' parents. Choy (201) defined this population of as one whose parents never completed educational programming that would yield a minimum baccalaureate degree, or one

whose parents never attended a college or university. The educational status of parents correlated to the challenges experienced by first gens matriculating and graduating from college.

Ward, Siegel, & Davenport (2012) explained limited or non-existent parental exposure to academic and social facets of post- secondary education influenced first gen's college success. This influence manifested in areas of enrollment selection, academic preparedness, college affordability and students' ability to social integrate. Limited or non-existent exposure to college also impacted institutions' retention and graduation efforts, particularly if the enrollment of first gens was high.

Opidee (2015) reported institutions that intentionally addressed the challenges associated with this demographic, noted an increase retention and degree completion of the first gens. To support the researcher will examine the perspectives of first gens and program administrators involved in targeted programming at a Georgia public college.

Research Questions:

1. What are the perceptions of first gens regarding academic and social support offered at Albany Technical College?
2. What are the perceptions of program administrators regarding academic and social support offered to first gens attending Albany Technical College?
3. To what extent do the perceptions of first gens and program administrators differ?

The researcher proposed to expand the body of research about first generation students and the influence of targeted academic and social integration programming designed to increase matriculation and graduation opportunities.

First generation students pursing a post-secondary education often encountered a set of challenges or conditions that impacted successful matriculation and degree attainment. Albany Technical College(ATC) governed by the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). TCSG in alliance with the nationally recognized Complete College America (CCA) initiative aimed to improve the enrollment and achievement gaps of under-represented student groups, in particular first generation students.

Targeted initiatives such as the TSCG's Complete College Georgia Student Success Initiative were designed to address challenges faced by under-served, first gen students who often lacked academic preparedness and the navigational skills required for degree attainment. In alliance with this component of the CCA initiative, ATC replicated and implemented measures targeting the first gen demographic (ATC, 2016).

In response to TSCG's Complete College American Initiative, ATC implemented the Student Tracking and Retention Services (STARS) program with the primary objective being encouraging the development of academic competence of all students (ATC'STARS, 2014). Particular emphasis was on the success of first year and first gen students. Because attrition of first gens was high the first year of matriculation, program administrators countered the effects that led to student drop out through targeted academic and social programming. Services included but were not limited to: study skills development, financial aid counseling, family and social situations counseling, academic tutoring and advisement. STARS' program administrators worked to create experiences that ultimately led to degree attainment for all students attending Albany Tech.

Research Design

The research design method chosen for the examination of the perceptions of first generation students and program administrators regarding academic and social support at Albany Technical College was mixed methods research. Mixed methods design supports the integration quantitative data and the analysis of information through the use of surveys coupled with semi-structured interviews commonly associated with qualitative research.

Quantitative research was not selected as the primary method. In comparison to qualitative, quantitative research considers the measurement of the subject instead of the experiences of the subject (Cohen, 1980). Creswell (1994) explained quantitative research as a type that explains the subject through the collection of numerical data and then analyzed based on mathematical methods, statistics in particular. Quantitative design applications quantify the variables including but not limited to behaviors, opinions and attitudes.

The qualitative design method supported the contextualization of institutional based programming and its influence on matriculation and degree attainment for first generation students. Qualitative research was rooted in the social inquiry. Social inquiry promoted understanding and insight into the perceptions based on the experiences of subject participants. Through a constructivist worldview, the researcher explored the attitudes, feelings, observations, and beliefs of the subjects' views and experiences regarding academic and social support received (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative research was exploratory in nature, and served as process application used to increase opportunities of gaining understanding of the motivations and reasons associated with a problem or condition being studied. Patton (1985) asserted,

> Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is

> not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to under the nature of that setting- what it means for the participants in the setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting- and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in the setting (p. 1).

Merriam (1997) expounded, noting, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6). Through the body of knowledge and insight gained as a result of the examination, researchers were then able to develop ideas or hypotheses in support of research subject. In addition, qualitative research provided the opportunity to flesh out themes or patterns discovered through perception and experience narratives provided by the participant subjects.

Qualitative methodology supported the analysis of the first gen population and introduced the "what" characteristics associated with the subjects. This approach also created the opportunity for the discovery of a possible phenomenon. Phenomenon(ology) considered a school of thought or theme associated with a group or subject. The word phenomenon was derived from the Greek *phaenesthai*, to flare up, to show itself, to appear. Constructed from *phaino*, phenomenon meant to bring to light, to place in brightness, to show itself (Moustakas, 1994).

It was important to note that the descriptive study approach was not applied for the purpose of determining the cause and effect of the phenomenon or situation influencing or effecting the population of study. Instead, the descriptive study research method was applied to aid in the description of the possible implications of the situations or phenomenon associated, as well as describe and explain findings.

Through a semi-structured, interview process, the researcher gathered data on the perspectives of the experiences of first gens and program administrators, considered and reviewed the similarities and differences, and assessed if these perspectives influenced the level of social engagement and academic attainment within the ATC environment. Crotty (1998), explained the semi-structured face-to-face interview process as incorporating a schematic design of questions or topics presented by the interviewer.

The researcher adopted a particular stance or position through the use of the qualitative methodology approach. Creswell (2013) the methodological approach was based on a system of rules, methods and or principles respective to the discipline.

Table 3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data collection and analysis of perspectives outline		
Conduct Survey	First generation students attending Albany Technical College Minimum of 30 students	
Conduct interviews	8-10 first generation students (sample) attending Albany Technical College	
Conduct interviews	All program administrators	
Transcripts	Transcribe students' interview results	Transcribe program administrators' interview results
Review data/information	Identify themes, patterns presented students	Identify themes, patterns presented by program administrator
Verification of information through qualitative analysis	Compare, contrast themes and patterns presented by first gen students and program administrators	

Table 3 presents details of the process utilized to collect, review, analyze, and present the data and information collected from study participants

Specific to the exploration of first gens' and program administrators' perceptions regarding academic and social support at Albany Technical College, a survey was administered to select study participants, followed by face- to- face, semi-structured interviews intended to capture trends, patterns and experiences. The researcher also assessed the demographic information. Quantitative analysis was used in the survey phase in order to identify similarities and contrasts based on student experiences. Qualitative analysis was used when examining the perceptions of all study participants disclosed during the interviews.

Population

Established in 1961 as vocational technical school, Albany Technical College(ATC) was a public post- secondary institution of the Technical College System of Georgia. The institution offered instruction of various academic disciplines in seven counties. Its main campus was nestled within the region of Southwest Georgia and the city of Albany. Enrollment included over 3,000 full time students and 2,500 part-time students. Its mission remained to provide technical education and training support for evolving workforce development needs in southwest Georgia. Students can earn competency-based associate degrees, diploma and technical certificates supporting career aspirations in the areas of business, technical science, health care technology, personal services and industrial careers. Academic divisions offer degrees and certificates in the following disciplines: manufacturing support and transportation; early childhood education; healthcare technology; public safety; and technology, business, and personal services.

The budget and funding support was typical of a public post- secondary institution. ATC was funded by a combination of state dollars, local dollars, state grants, federal grants, bond funds and tuition. Student demographics ranged from high-school students earning college credits through the Move On When Ready (MOWR) initiative to non-traditional adult learners. When comparing the gender makeup, females dominated enrollment. The college accurately reflected the southwest Georgia community's racial makeup. The majority of the students attending were African Americans, followed by Caucasians. There were a very small number of Latino and Asian students attending (ATC STARS, 2014).

Based on 2016 statistics provided by the Higher Education Research Institute:

- 48% of first gens are more likely to attend two year schools than their peers
- According to a 2008 Pell Institute study, first gens were more than seven times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree if they started in four- year institution as opposed to a two- year institution.

Albany Technical College was selected as the data collection site/sample unit as 75% of its student base was under-served/first generation students. Successful retention and degree completion were strategic priorities for the institution. As a result, college administrators created department that focused on successful academic and social acclimation of first generation and first year students.

Participants

Approximately 30-60 first gens were surveyed. Student participants represented those in the early stages of matriculation to those nearing degree completion. All of the program administrators were asked to participate in the survey.

Sample

Recruiting participants for the study entailed contacting ATC's Registrar's Office to request a list of prospective first gens who entered Fall of 2017. Based on the identified number provided by the Registrar, an email was sent inviting students to participate in the questionnaire survey. Based on survey responses eight to ten students and three to eight retention specialists were invited to interview. The invitation included the purpose of the study: the influence of targeted academic and social support programming on first generation students. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was completed for the purpose of seeking permission to collect data from prospective study participants.

Instrumentation

Guba (1998) reported a survey was a systematic method of gathering information from a sample extracted from a large population. The use of this method in the qualitative research approach supported the exploration and examination of the meanings and experiences introduced through the perspectives of the participants (Fink, 2003). The questionnaire survey was designed with open-ended responses. Responses guided the identification and selection of prospective participants to be interviewed. The survey included basic demographic information including: whether the student was the first in their family to attend college, the number of semesters attended and full or part-time status.

Data Collection

The researcher selected and appliee the best method suited for the data collection effort (LeCompte, Milroy & Preissle, 1992). With the mixed method application, the researcher served as the lead data collector. The goal was to obtain data and or information through observations,

followed by interpretation that explained experiences, presented themes or phenomena (Merriam, 1997). The process began with administering a survey in order to glean willingness for participation. Once the potential participants consented to participate, the researcher scheduled interviews. The main task in interviewing was to understand the meaning of what the interviewees said (Kvale, 1996). McNamara (1999), interviews were particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer pursued in-depth information around the topic.

The interview instrument was an adaptation of *First- Generation Latina Commuter Students' Perception of Factors that Influence their Persistence toward College Completion.* Permission was granted by the dissertation author, Dr. Faraah Ann Mullings via an email communication. The interview design included the overarching questions that pertained to the first gen students and the program administrators. A series of sub questions associated with the overarching questions was added.

Response Rate

In order to ensure an acceptable response rate, permission was sought from Albany Technical College's offices of the Registrar and Institutional Effectiveness to solicit participation in the survey study from currently enrolled first generation students. The researcher anticipated a response rate of 100% from the program administrators. First gens attending ATC represented 75% of the student population. The researcher anticipated a student response rate of 100%.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) noted that data collection analysis was a simultaneous process in qualitative research. The process included the classification of persons, events and associated

characteristics. The researcher collected participants' interview responses and transcribe. This information was then transcribed for the purpose of forming rich data. Upon initially reading the response, a subsequent reading occurred in search of common phrases, terminology, themes, patterns or phenomenon. Identified and prevalent themes or patterns were categorized. Bogdan and Biklen, (2006), suggested the triangulation process validated data and information through comparative verification of two or more sources.

Reporting Data

Miles, 1994, introduced six analytical strategies that support the reporting of data as researcher.

1. Coding of data from notes, observations or interviews
2. Recoding insights and reflections on the data
3. Sorting through the data to identify similar phrases, patterns, themes, sequences and important features
4. Looking for commonalities and differences among the data an extracting them for further consideration and analysis
5. Gradually deciding on a small group or generalizations that hold true for the data
6. Examining these generalizations in the light of existing knowledge

Findings of Study

A table was used to compare possible themes and patterns identified from data obtained from study participants: first gen students and program administrators. Data and information was also presented in a narrative description. Participant demographics and characteristics

applicable to first gen and program administrators participating in the study were listed as well as the distinguishing characteristics.

Summary

In order to examine the perspectives of first gens and post- secondary practitioners regarding academic and social support offered at Albany Technical College (ATC) a mixed method study was performed by the researcher. The first phase of the study entailed student participants' completion of a survey. Throughout the second phase of the study the researcher utilized a semi- structured format to interview 8-10 selected survey respondents as well as a minimum of five program administrators. All participants were identified and selected with the assistance of the ATC's office of Institutional Effectiveness and Registrar.

CHAPTER IV
REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The researcher examined Albany Technical College's(ATC) first generation (first gen) students and program administrators' perceptions regarding academic and social integration of first gens was the focus of the study.

Research Questions

Participant questions posed in the student survey and the semi-structured interviews were based on the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of first gen students regarding academic and social support offered at Albany Technical College?

2. What are the perceptions of program administrators regarding academic and social support offered to first generation students at Albany Technical College?

3. To what extent do perceptions of first gens and program administrators differ?

Research Design

The mixed method design method was applied to study and assess any relationship of first gen degree pursuits to targeted programming. The analysis was based on the the perceptions of the study participants, Albany Technical College's first generation (first gens) students and program administrators.

The researcher obtained perceptions from the student survey and semi structured interviews. The goal was to explore the attitudes and thoughts regarding academic and social integration support.

Respondents

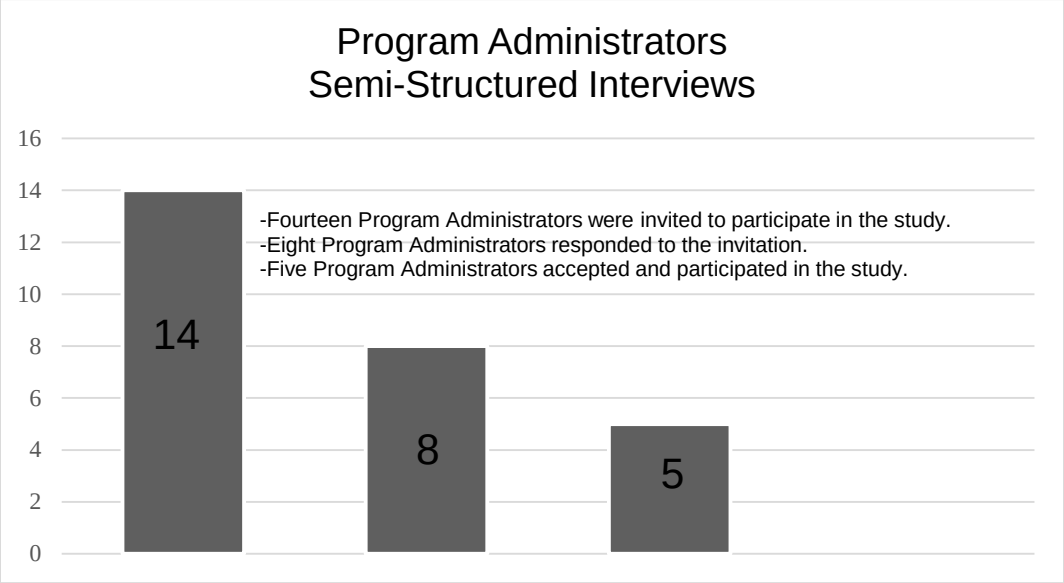
Thirty- seven students accepted the invitation to complete the student survey. Twelve of the thirty-seven who identified as first gens expressed interested in participating in the semi-structured interviews. All were contacted; however only eight responded to the follow- up. The eight were interviewed in a face-to-face format or via phone conference.

Forty-three percent of the participants surveyed attended ATC for two years. The remaining number of participants attended ATC for one year or less or three to four years. Fifty-six percent of the participants surveyed identified themselves as a first generation students. Survey participants were nearly split when asked if they experienced academic and social integration challenges. Fifty- one percent reported they experienced academic and social integration challenges, while the remaining 49% reported they had not. Fifty-seven percent of the students reported a full-time classification status. An overwhelming majority of 76% reported transportation was not an issue and thus did not impact ability to attend class(es). Eighty-one percent of the respondents identified as financial aid recipients. Seventy-two percent of the students reported family and work obligations impact study efforts and habits. The majority of the respondents, totaling 70% confirmed family support of degree pursuits. Lastly, 59% of the respondents were unfamiliar with the name of ATC's targeted programming, STARS.

Fourteen program administrators were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview phase of the study. Whether serving in the role of academic advisor, special

populations advisor or retention specialist all served the first gen population through the STARS program. Eight agreed to participate, however only five responded to the interview scheduling request.

Figure 1. Program Administrators invited, responded and accepted invitation to participate in semi- structured interview phase of the study.



Findings

The researcher proposed to examine the perceptions of first gens and program administrators' regarding academic and social support offered at Albany Technical College. The researcher sought to identify barriers and challenges that impacted the success of first gen students as well as programmatic initiatives applied to counter identified challenges and barriers. There were six major themes that emerged from the study based on the perceptions of the participants. These themes correlated to earlier research regarding first gens in higher education environments. Factors associated with academic preparedness, social integration, cost of tuition, exposure to college prior to admission, socio economic status and post- secondary programs/data

analytics influenced the matriculation and graduation success of first gens attending Albany Technical College.

With the direct involvement and support of program administrators, first gens were educated and equipped with strategies designed to diminish or eliminate barriers that impede or derail academic and social integration success. A clear pattern of collective and shared perceptions regarding the intent of support emerged. Both first gens and program administrators reported obvious efforts to counter challenges associated with this student demographic. Study participants' perceptions were consistent regarding the student engagement of programmatic services. However, student and program administrators differed as to why students failed to consistently engage services prior to the peak of academic or social stress.

All of the participants assessed provided insight into their direct or indirect experiences associated with factors influencing student success. The primary research questions were the basis for the questions posed in student survey format as well as the participant interviews to the selected participants.

Academic preparedness

Lack of academic preparedness was a common issue experienced by first gens matriculating the first year of college (Engle, Bermeo & O'Brien, 2006). Academic preparedness was also the leading challenge of the student participants. Forty- eight percent of the 37 survey respondents indicated experiencing both academic challenges as a first gen attending Albany Technical College. Of the eight interviewed, only one indicated that they were academically prepared for college. Student 34A reported, "My classes have not been difficult at all. I knew what to expect because I took college courses during high school." The other seven

reported experiencing inadequate academic training and preparation throughout high- school. The majority reported deficiencies in core subjects- English, reading and math. All of the participants attended "local" or "rural" area high schools and minimal academic achievement was the standard. Academic deficiencies were evident shortly after students' matriculation began. Student 14A indicated, "It has been difficult. Teachers in high school did not prepare me for college. There are so many things I should have learned that I didn't. Writing has been my biggest problem."

Program administrators' perspectives were divided in comparison to the students' dominate views on the subject of academic preparedness. Two of the five administrators agreed students lacked necessary academic experiences needed to successfully achieve academically in college. Another two of the five, shared students have the necessary academic backgrounds; however, the motivation and study techniques ultimately determined success. Only one of the five program administrators were of the mindset that academic preparedness was directly tied to one's major or program choice. Program administrator A3 noted, "In certificate or stand-alone programs they are academically prepared. When students work to achieve associate degrees, deficiencies in reading and writing are obvious."

Social Integration

Social integration perspectives of students were consistent. The majority indicated ATC regularly creates integration opportunities and services available to all students, particularly first gens, and those designated as special populations. Despite the institution's intentional efforts and initiatives in support of student integration, many students elected not to socially engage or interact. "I am aware of the activities that ATC offers, but my focus is to attend my classes. I

know most of the students and it reminds me of high school", said student 25A. Student 10A shared, "I am older an older student who works. I don't connect with the younger students. I attend classes and leave campus". Four themes tied to non-social integration surfaced from student interviews:

1. Committed work obligations
2. Uncomfortable with interacting with students outside of age group
3. Atmosphere similar to high school
4. Primary focus is academic/degree completion.

In comparison, program administrators' perspectives were similar regarding social integration support and engagement. Despite offerings, students failed to interact, socialize or engage in integration programming. The common thought was students fail to go beyond what was familiar to them. Students were socially lacking and intimidated by the overall experience. As a result, program administrators offered one on one and collective training in the areas of networking, peer accountability and student/faculty communication. These along with other services were designed to complement students' academic experiences and advancement.

Three of the five program administrators reported a marked difference between male and female first gens as it related to social integration. It was reported that females were less challenged with social integration. Males in comparison had difficulty to the degree that grades are negatively impacted. Many of the five were of the opinion that social integration and the application of social skills were directly tied to students' academic performance. "First gen males take the chance of academic failing before they will seek help or guidance from faculty of

members of the achievement center. As we began to notice a pattern it was discovered many of our males were unaware of how to approach instructors with inquiries or how to ask for help. So often when they did ask for help or bring their academic stress to our attention it was too late", stated program specialist, A2.

Cost of Tuition

The challenge of college affordability, specifically the cost of tuition weighed heavily into the students' initial and ongoing success at Albany Tech. The challenge was shared by students and program administrators with the exception of one participant. Limited understanding of financial aid support, tax forms, completion/submission, financial aid jargon and deadlines was reported to impact students' transition and continuance in college. One program administrator had a contrasting perspective on the topic. "College affordability is not an issue for the majority of our students as 95% qualify for student aid. Because of this reality, it should not factor into a student's matriculation success," state Special Populations Coordinator, A4.

College exposure prior to admission

Program administrators' perspectives regarding first gens exposure to college prior to entry was synonymous and the majority viewed extreme value in prior exposure, benefiting early acclimation and the understanding of college processes and expectations. Retention specialists and academic advisors also known as program administrators expressed identification of first gens with previous exposure to college were easily identifiable. Retention specialist, A1, stated, "First gens are more focused and they know the language. Those that have not been exposed turn in assignments late, lack time management are a less dedicated to school. Students previous

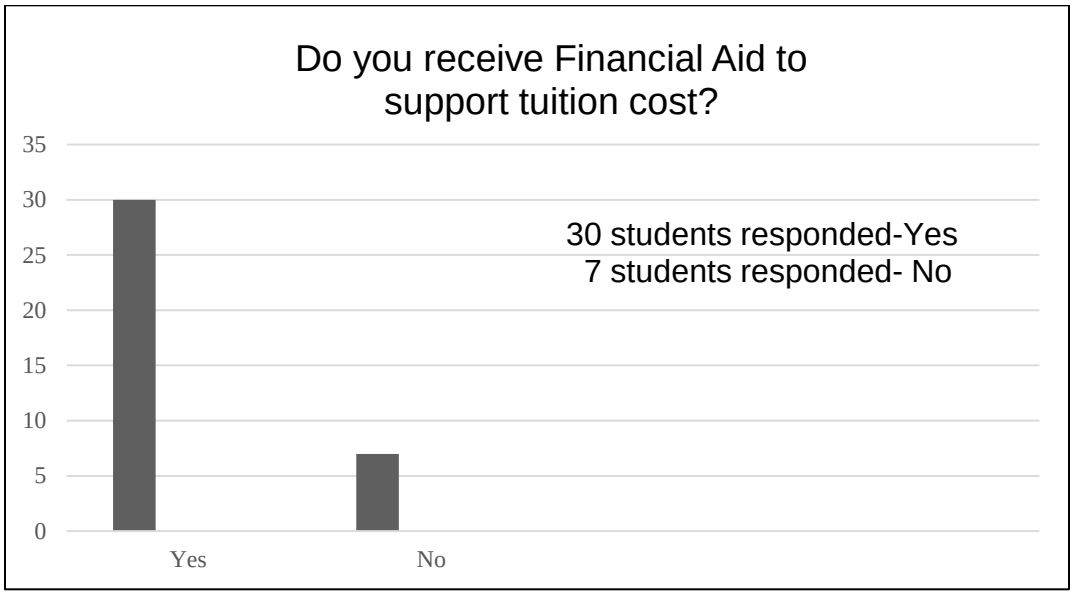
exposed are more likely to take advantage of available academic resources. They are more independent and require far less hand holding than their counterpart."

Student perspectives regarding the influence of college exposure prior to college were based on students' engagement with college graduates. Of the first gens who self- disclosed as a non-traditional and or older students, all stated exposure to college occurred through the engagement with high school instructors or counselors who had completed college. Other student participants identified not only teachers and counselors, but aunts, uncles and mentors as conduits to college experiences or exposure. Student 34A shared, "I recall my uncles and aunts asking me what college I planned to attend. I don't remember them telling me about how to schedule or register for classes or how to select instructors. That kind of information would have been helpful. I could have asked them, but I didn't know what to ask." In comparison, student 25A shared, "I had a mentor who guided me while in high school. She taught me how to select a college, a major and the importance of make the most of the opportunity."

Socio Economic Status

First gen study participants either directly or indirectly reported being of low socio economic status. Pursuing a college degree was necessitated by the need for many to assist parents financially or to improve one's economic condition. Financial aid in addition to income earned from current employment supported tuition and living costs for both students and their families. Based on student survey responses, the majority of the participants received financial aid to cover the cost of tuition.

Figure 2. Number of Financial Aid recipients participating in survey



When questioned as to what background influences motivated attendance at Albany Tech, over half indicated it was the need to improve financially. Responses included, “Money has always been tight for my family and I need to help my mom and siblings”, student 3A. Student 8A responded, “Working while attending school is not optional.” These comments correlated to the identified financial barrier many first gens encounter while attending college.

Program administrators affirmed that many first gens attending ATC from low socio economic backgrounds must work while attending college. However, unlike first gens questioned, program administrators reported first gens who worked encountered additional challenges beyond the financial aspect of the socio economic scope. First gens classified as low socio economic were in the special populations group. Program administrator A3 shared, “We

pay close attention to their needs and academic movement. They struggle more than the other populations, academically and socially. Despite their vulnerability the struggle with asking for help, accessing available resources, poor study habits etc. For them we make workshops mandatory. We bring entire classes or cohorts to our Economic Environment Center, Academic Achievement Center and Career Placement Center. We then identify specific needs and tailor our services to each student. Its critical to retention", stated Special Populations Coordinator, A4.

Retention specialist, A2 noted, "Some succeed despite the low socio economic status. Those are the first gens that use low socio economic status as a motivator. They are focused and committed to the goal of completion." Special populations coordinator and an academic advisor perspectives highlighted the mental aspect of the low socio economic condition. Special populations coordinator, A4 shared, "Many first gens work and maximize financial aid in order to address tuition costs, resulting in greater access to money. Portions of financial aid reimbursements are used for immediate gratification." Student 3A affirmed the special coordinators thought, "I get enough financial aid that I am able to also my family, buy clothes and other things." This mindset decreases the focus of the importance and value of an education. Academic Advisor, A5 noted, "Being of a lower socio-economic status can place a non-independent thinker into a mindset of perpetual poverty. Once engrained the mindset continues to feed the need for immediate gratification. As a result, first gens never fully learn to value the educational opportunity before them. They work, neglecting studies because the focus is placed on the value of acquiring things and not an education."

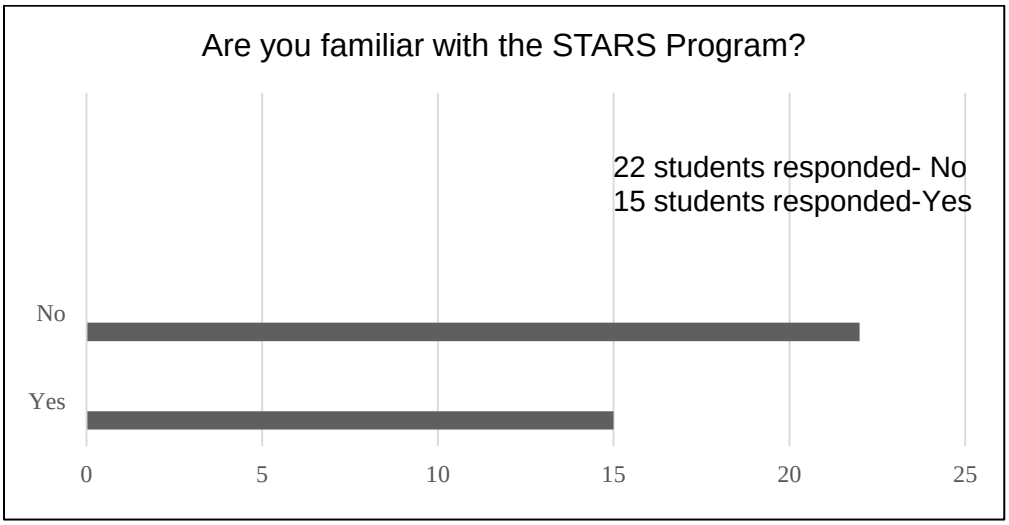
Program administrator, A1 reported, "First gens commonly enroll and register as fulltime students not for the purpose of earning college credits, but to maximize financial aid

opportunities (Pell, Hope, loans) offsetting expenses at home. The irony is that many of them leave college sorely in debt, some with a degree, many without, and still sanctioned to a low socio economic status." Academic advisor A5 shared, "Socio economic backgrounds determine a student's ability to read, experience diverse learning styles and go beyond immediate surroundings. When students lack in these areas it effects them academically and socially."

Post- secondary program (STARS) and Data Analytics (Early Alert)

Post-secondary officials responsible for the STARS program provided systems of support that guided the academic and social adjustment of first gens and first year students into Albany Technical College. Information about services provided begin early in a student's matriculation and continued through targeted communications. Instructors and academic advisors reinforced the types and availability of services as they engaged and interacted with students. Notwithstanding efforts, only a few of the students surveyed and interviewed recognized the STARS program by name. The following figure reflected survey responses when students were asked: Are you familiar with the STARS program?

Figure 3. Survey respondents reflects the number of student participants familiar with the STARS program.



In comparison, students interviewed were familiar with the programmatic academic and social integration services provided. All indicated they experienced the academic advising as well as a time management, study skills, and effective communication workshops. Three of the eight students indicated they regularly visited math and writing labs. Student 20A shared, "I was a little embarrassed about going to get help at first. I got over it. I don't write well, but the lab helped me to get better." Others only sought services at the point of academic crisis. When asked why they had not taken proactive steps prior to academic crisis all responded that work or family obligations dominated their schedules, preventing regular visits to the academic achievement center. Student 3A indicated, " To be honest, I was failing in math the first time I took it. Because I didn't get help, I had to take the class over."

Program administrators reported students fail to take advantage of the full slate of programmatic services offered through STARS. Retention specialist, A4 noted, "We tailor our services to meet their needs. I teach students how to plan their entire day. We show them how to create daily schedules that include work, free time, study time etc. If they need employment, we

partner them a Career Services. We also teach how developing relationships with instructors can lead to internships or employment. We in the STARS program teach life skills."

The Early Alert System bridged communication between first gen and program administrators. Instructors documented when students were experiencing academic stress in the early alert system. STARS program administrators and students' academic advisors were notified. Program administrators immediately attempted to make contact with the student in order to design and implement a plan of intervention. "Action plans vary. It's not always an academic need, sometimes our first gens fall into special populations. They need access to childcare resources, or have transportation issues or become homeless. We work to support them so that they do not suffer academically", noted Retention Specialist, A1.

Data specific to the survey involved 37 student participants. Table 4, presented 37 student participants and associated survey responses. Eight of the 37 students were selected to be interviewed based on self-identification as a first gen and agreement to participate in the semi-structured interview phase of the study. The letter "A" coupled with a respondent number denoted the students that participated in the interview phase. The survey instrument used was designed to collect demographical information and identify interview participants. Demographical information was limited to the following: identification as first gen, years matriculating full or part-time status, academic or social integration challenges, influence of public transportation, financial aid recipient, influence of family or work obligations, family support and knowledge of the STARS program.

The following table outlines responses made by the 37 students participating in the survey phase of the study.

Table 4. Student Survey Participant Responses

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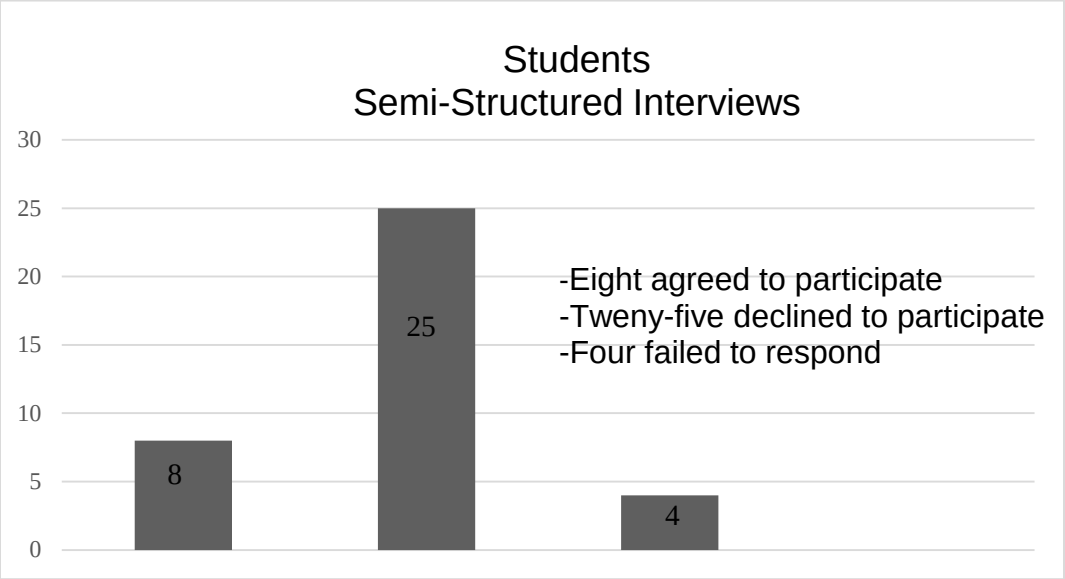
Respondent	Year(s) at ATC	First generation student	Difficulty academically or socially	Full- time or part-time	Public transportation	Financial Aid	Family or work obligations influence study habits or academic performance	Family support attending college	Familiar with STAR's program
1	2	Yes	Yes	FT	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
2	2	Yes	Yes	FT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3A	1	Yes	Yes	FT	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
4	2	No	Yes	PT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
5	1	Yes	Yes	PT	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
6	1	Yes	No	FT	No	No	No	No	Yes
7	2	No	No	FT	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
8A	3	Yes	No	PT	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
9	2	No	No	FT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
10A	2	Yes	No	FT	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
11	1	No	Yes	FT	No	No	No	No	No
12	1	Yes	No	PT	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
13	4	Yes	Yes	FT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
14A	2	Yes	Yes	PT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
15	1	No	Yes	FT	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
16	2	No	Yes	PT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
17	1	Yes	Yes	FT	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Respondent	Year(s) at ATC	First generation student	Difficulty academically or socially	Full- time or part-time	Public transportation	Financial Aid	Family or work obligations influence study habits or academic performance	Family support attending college	Familiar with STAR's program
18	4	Yes	Yes	FT	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
19	1	No	No	PT	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
20A	2	Yes	Yes	PT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
21	2	No	Yes	PT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
22	1	Yes	Yes	FT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
23	4	Yes	No	PT	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
24	1	No	No	FT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
25A	1	Yes	No	FT	No	Yes	No	No	No
26	2	No	No	FT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
27	1	No	No	FT	No	Yes	No	No	No
28	1	No	Yes	PT	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
29	2	No	No	PT	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
30	3	Yes	No	PT	No	No	Yes	No	No
31	1	No	Yes	PT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
32	2	Yes	Yes	PT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
33	4	No	No	FT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
34A	2	Yes	No	FT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
35	1	No	Yes	FT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
36A	2	Yes	No	PT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
37	2	No	No	PT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Twenty- five of the 37 students who participated in the survey declined the invitation to participate in the semi-structured interview phase. Four failed to respond to the invitation. The eight students who agreed to participate were posed questions directly related to the academic and social integration research questions. Interview questions aligned with the major research regarding first gens and intentional programming designed to address barriers impacting successful matriculation and graduation. Interview responses were then transcribed for the purpose of identifying themes or patterns. The information and or data were compared and contrasted to the data respective to all study participants.

Figure 4. Students invited, accepted and declined to participate in the semi structured interview phase of study.



Five program administrators participated in the semi structured interviews. Two of the participants specialized in the retention of first gen students. Another two of the five devoted time to the academic advisement of first gens. Only one of the participant's focus exceeded the scope of first gens, the special populations coordinator. All of the participants regularly engaged first gens matriculating to the institution. The years of service in their individual roles ranged from one to eight years. Interview questions aligned with the major research regarding first gens and intentional programming designed to address barriers that impacted successful matriculation and graduation. Interview responses were then transcribed for the purpose of identifying themes or patterns. The information and data were compared and contrasted to the data collected from student participant interviews. The table presents the program administrators that participated in the study, the frequency of engagement with first gens and the years of service in the respective roles.

Table 5. Program Administrator Participant Profile			
Respondent	Retention Specialist, Special Populations Coordinator, Academic Advisor	Frequency of engagement with first gens	Years serving in role
A1	Retention Specialist	Daily	6 years
A2`	Retention Specialist	Daily	1 year
A3	Academic Advisor	Daily	8 months
A4	Special Populations Coordinator	Daily	8 years
A5	Academic Advisor	Daily	4 years

Summary

The mixed methods examination of the study participants, first generation students and program administrators entailed the the collection and assessment of data related to perceptions concerning academic and social integration support. The collection process included a survey assessment and semi-structured interviews. Students participated in both survey and interview phases of the study. Program administrators were invited and participated in only the interview phase of the study.

Ten questions were posed to 37 student participants. The majority of were first generation students and all were currently attending Albany Technical College(ATC). All were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Only eight of the 37 were selected and agreed. A digital

recorder was used to record interviews. The instrument, Survey Monkey was used to collect. Data was then coded and assessed.

Eight students and five program administrators participated in the interview phase. The researcher used a digital recorder to collect responses. Interviews were transcribed. Study participants' responses were compared and contrasted to other student and program administrator responses. Fourteen program administrators were invited to participants. The researcher posed ten questions to program administrators and eleven questions to student participants during respective interviews.

Responses among student participants were consistent. Albany Technical College does provide academic and social integration support to first generation students. Many only sought academic support only when necessary. Social integration engagement was limited based on work/family obligations or disinterest due to "high school" atmosphere.

Responses among program administrators were also consistent. Academic and social integration support services are readily available to all students, in particular, first year and first generation. Parallel to student responses, program administrators agreed that students only pursue support opportunities at the point of academic stress. In contrast, program administrators viewed students lack of engagement to lack of commitment and making education secondary to work obligations as oppose to striking an education/work balance.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

As presented, colleges and universities across the United States admit over 4.5 million first generation (first gen) students a year. Researchers who study the historic characteristics, trends and patterns associated with the retention and graduation success of this population identified commonalities related to first generation students regardless the institution of matriculation.

These commonalities or characteristics influenced the first gens ability to successfully pursue and complete degree completion efforts. An institution's retention and graduation numbers were also impacted particularly those with high populations of first gens. Albany Technical College was selected as the site of research study as over 75% of students that attend and graduate represent first gens and or under-served populations.

Throughout the research and data collection stages, evidence of the challenges first gens experience was presented and affirmed. In addition, the measures institutions take to counter and address the challenges in support of this demographic were presented. The research was based on the perspectives provided by a sample of Albany Technical College's (ATC) first generation (first gen) student population and the program administrators tasked with providing students' academic and social integration support through targeted programmatic efforts.

Common barriers impacting retention and graduation of first gens- academic preparedness, social integration, tuition cost, transportation, socio economic status and family support paralleled the larger body of research. However, only two of the identified six barriers identified critically impacted the success of ATC's first gens; academic preparedness and socio-economic status.

Analysis of Research Findings

Survey and interview questions were guided by three research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of first gens regarding academic and social support offered at Albany Technical College?

2. What are the perceptions of program administrators regarding academic and social support offered to first gens attending Albany Technical College?

3. To what extent do the perceptions of first gens and program administrators differ?

The first major finding that aligned with the perspectives of the study participants was academic preparedness. Students entering and matriculating with deficiencies in the areas of reading, writing and math struggled academically. Despite data analytics used in the form of an early warning system, an achievement center that encompassed, math, reading and writing labs and access to tailored intervention plans, students either failed to seek the services offered or pursue the services at a point where little could be done to correct the academic issue(s).

The second major finding was the challenge of social integration. In comparison to earlier research underserved populations related integration challenges on campuses not creating an inclusive climate and culture. ATC' first gens social integration challenges were based on numerous factors. Students experienced integration challenges for one of two reasons: they likened the social climate to that of high school or work/family obligations precluded involvement and engagement on campus. Regarding support services, students typically sought resources at points of distress as opposed to being familiar with services due to periodic or continuous involvement.

The third major finding encompassed family support, cost of tuition, exposure to college and transportation. Based on the perspectives shared, neither of the three significantly factored into first gens ability to succeed at Albany Technical College. Financial aid or the means to pay tuition was not an issue for the students questioned. Program administrators affirmed. A majority of respondents indicated moral support and pride were demonstrated by students' families regarding about the decision to attend college. In addition, despite parents' not having attended college, many first gens participants studied had direct exposure to college graduates through other family members or academic experiences. Lastly, a small percentage of respondents relied on public transportation to travel to classes. However, all respondents reported the mode of transportation did not impact attendance. Program administrators reported that resources were available to students that lacked funds needed to secure public transportation service.

The fourth and final major finding was socio economic status. Students and program administrator participants, agreed that first gens classified as low socio economic had a different perspective about degree pursuits. Some used the status as motivation to complete the degree while others viewed the need for income as top priority and degree completion was secondary. As a result of this decision, many suffered academically and or simply failed to complete earning a college degree.

Table 6. Comparison of Participant Differences and Commonalities

Students Differences	Program Administrators Differences	Students/Program Administrators Commonalities
1. Students academically deficient in math, reading and English	1. Academic under-preparedness necessitated labs and tailored intervention.	1. Family support first gens decision and efforts to pursue a college degree.
2. Students failed to take seek academic and social support services due to external obligations.	2. Students sought academic and support services only at the point of crisis.	2. Students were not familiar with the STARS program by name,, but were aware of the academic and social support services available and accessible.
3. Social climate was welcoming and inclusive, comparable to high-school.	3.Female students sought support services in higher numbers compared to male students.	
4. Tuition cost, transportation and family support did not impact degree pursuit.	4. Low socio economic status is either a motivation to succeed or hinders making education pursuit a top priority.	

Discussion of Research Findings

Student perceptions presented in the study aligned with the greater body of literature regarding academic and social integration support. Albany Technical College (ATC) first gens over-whelmingly agreed that lack of academic preparedness was an issue and challenged their ability to successfully integrate academically. Based on institutional data, and the shared experiences and perspectives of study participants, academic preparedness was the lead issue for first year and first generation students matriculating ATC. Both groups studied agreed that first gens enter college with academic deficiencies in key core competency areas-writing, reading and math. Congruent with major research, under-preparedness of ATC students impacted their

ability to successfully advance within respective academic disciplines. As a result of this pattern which influenced overall retention and graduation outcomes, ATC established math and writing labs to address students' academic deficits. Managed through the STARS program, labs along with tailored academic tutoring are made available to all all students with emphasis placed on first gen and first year students.

There was a marked difference in the perspectives of participant groups regarding why students fail to regularly engage academic support offerings. Students reported that work and family obligations precluded active or regular engagement. Program administrators attributed the lack of engagement to students' failed understanding of the consequences of not seeking assistance as well as failing to prioritize education and limited understanding of the complexity of degree pursuit.

Student perceptions regarding the social support offered at ATC also aligned with the literature and perspectives shared by the program administrators. Students consistently reported observing the institution's intentional programming efforts designed to instill connection and sense of belonging. Program administrators presented a myriad of support services made available to students. In contrast to the literature that highlights first gens challenges with acclimating or being accepted into the respective environment, ATC students reported that lack of social acclimation or engagement was an intentional decision. The most common perspective shared was the social climate was reminiscent of high school decreasing one's interest to participate. As a result, many chose to solely focus on the academic aspect of attending college and forgo social integration activities. Notwithstanding the decision not engage the majority of the students viewed the overall climate as welcoming and encompassing.

Overall ATC's program administrators' and students' perceptions aligned with the literature regarding the benefits of offering targeted academic and social support. Learning and social engagement outcomes improved throughout academic cycles as students accessed the support services offered at Albany Tech. Comparable to data presented in the literature, ATC 's Early Alert System proved critical to improvement efforts. Data were collected and used to create and tailor individual plans designed to improve a student's retention and graduation opportunity.

Academic preparedness

Comparable to the greater body of research, academic preparedness was a paramount issue for Albany Technical College and the first gens. As recounted by Hosel and Harvey (2012), colleges and universities admit students with deficiencies in core competencies. These academic deficits can delay or prevent advancing into intended disciplines of study. D'Amico and Dika (2013) reported institutions often fail to provide services to correct and address students' deficiencies. Like other institutions faced with this reality, Albany Technical College admitted and matriculated high populations of first gens with academic deficiencies. As a result, the institution maintained programmatic systems designed to correct and improve the academic deficiencies of students.

The STARS program' lead objective was to promote the development of academic competence for all students attending. Although the program targets first year and first generation students, all students have access and are offered support. Specific to the area of academic preparedness math, writing and reading learning support as well as academic

monitoring and advisement was provided to students lacking the academic foundation needed to improve learning development and outcomes.

Social Integration

Students successful social integration into the campus climate and environment supported academic development and advancement. According to Olson (2014), when institutions intentionally took steps to improve the social engagement and integration of first gens retention and graduation rates increased. Comparable, ATC's STARS program committed various campus resources and services that support social acclimation and integration. Exposure to established college networks and college graduates prior to admittance contributed to a student's social adaptation and acclimation and improved opportunities of understanding, clarity and expectation (Shackner, 2015). Aware of this reality, program administrators offered instruction and guidance to students on life-skills, effective student/faculty communication and college navigation techniques within the first semester of students' matriculation.

Student participants interviewed expressed that the only challenge associated with social climate integration was not of acceptance but that the environment mirrored their high school experience. As a result, many made the decision to only engage in the academic aspects of earning a college degree because the social exposure was familiar and offered little no value. In contrast, program administrators attributed lack of engagement to lack of understanding of the benefits of the services offered

Cost of educating first generation students

Regardless of cost, many two -year and four -year institutions recognized the value of allocating resources in order to eliminate barriers that impeded academic success and social

integration of first gens pre and post college admission (Antweel, Hull & Reisel, 2011). Because first gen students represented the largest segment at Albany Technical College the institution identified resources and implemented programming designed to counter retention and degree completion challenges experienced by first gen students that attended. Participants agreed, both students and program administrators that financial aid adequately met tuition costs. In contrast to the literature, tuition cost proved to not be a barrier for first gen students.

Exposure to college and college role models prior to admissions

Both student and program administrator participants reported first gens lacked understanding of college processes when prior college exposure was limited or nonexistent. In the case of first gens, lack of prior exposure influenced students' degree completion endeavors. One ATC program administrator noted the difference between first gens who were regularly exposed to college or college graduates and those not exposed was glaringly obvious. For those exposed to college prior to ATC enrollment, the adjustment and understanding of the processes and expectations occurred with ease. As reflected in earlier studies, lack of understanding determined if students registered for classes, completed financial steps, received academic advisement or completed a degree (Shackner ,2015).

Socio Economic Background

Richardson and Skinner (2012) reported that benefits of serving historically under-served student populations were high, given the continued global push for economic and social mobility. Despite the benefits of earning a college degree, challenges associated with being low socio economic often hindered degree attainment, particularly those in the low socio economic strata. Researchers showcased the academic and social toll on first gens ranked in the low socio

economic strata. Martin (2015) reported that low socio economic status impeded under-served students' ability to integrate and advance in college. Shacker (2015), shared that many low-income first gens were forced to work full time, delaying degree completion from the traditional timeline.

While 45% of ATC students surveyed indicated they attend as part-time students, the majority of students interviewed stated they were forced to work to support respective households and families. From the students' perspective, educational pursuits were equally prioritized to the need to earn an immediate income. Program administrators' perspectives differed. Based on observations and experiences with first gens, the incorporation of education/work/life training into program objectives remained a necessity. Liberman (2016), reported that in addition to tuition costs, low income students must manage other costs and expenses related to living-rent, food, childcare, transportation, health and medical that made working while attending college a requirement instead of an option, particularly for first gen students.

Research include race and gender as critical factors relative to a student's socio-economic status (SES). Brown and Bok (1998) stressed the importance of servicing the needs of first gens when race was an obvious factor by incorporating systems and measures that influenced a healthy social adjustment and engagement. Albany Technical College observed that African American(AA) males had the lowest retention and graduation rates when compared to other student demographics. There was evidence that females attending regardless of race, seek academic and social support services in greater number as well as matriculate and graduate in greater numbers than males. As a result of this disparity, ATC implemented a mentoring

component to the STARS program, partnering AA male students with mentors. Mathewson (2016), noted African Americans and Latinos comprised a large segment of first gens in post-secondary environments, suggesting institutions should incorporate first gens needs into strategic priorities and planning.

Post- secondary institutions' application of targeted programming and data analytics

ATC's STARS program and specific use of the Early Warning System component was used to identify students experiencing difficulty either academically or socially from the onset of matriculation. Based on grade report, classroom observations or self-disclosure, students were immediately contacted by a STARS representative in order create an action plan to address the student's issues or needs. Through a concerted effort, retention specialists, mentors and faculty that provided instruction to the student(s) needing assistance to improve learning and social acclimation outcomes. In comparison to Albany Tech's STARS, Kenyon College's KEEP (Kenyon Educational Enrichment Program) engaged academically challenged students with faculty or administrative mentors. Students were then monitored until degree completion (Tucker, 2014). Albany Technical College's STARS programming targeting first gens aligned with the analysis of other post-secondary institutions showcased throughout major research reports. Academic and social integration support positively influence the retention and graduation outcomes of students that face barriers that impede success within the collegiate environment.

Table 7. Findings- Participants Differences in relation to the literature

Student Findings	Program Administrator Findings
1. Students were academically deficient in math, reading and English. 2. Students fail to take advantage of academic and social support services due to external obligations. 3. Social climate is welcoming, but compared that of "high school". 4. Tuition cost, transportation and family support did not impact degree pursuit. 5. Low socio economic status is either a motivator or hindrance.	1. Academic under- preparedness necessitated labs and tailored student intervention. 2. Students only take advantage of academic and social support services at the point crisis, if at all. 3. Female students regularly sought support services comparison to male students who wait until the point of crisis. 4. Low socio economic status is either a motivation to succeed or hinders making education pursuit a top priority.

Table 8. Participants Commonalities in relation to the literature (Students and Program Administrators)
1. First gens families support the decision to pursue a degree 2. Although students were not familiar with the program name, the STARS' academic and social support services are readily available and accessible.

Conclusions

Research objectives were introduced in chapter one, followed by an overview of the literature that supports the challenges and issues that influence academic and social integration

efforts of the first gens in chapter two. Chapter three of the study outlined an explanation of the methodology used to collect and analyze data. Chapter four contents included an interpretation and analysis of the data derived from the survey and interviews based participants' perspectives. The data were organized according to the identified areas that influences the success of first gens in post-secondary environments- academic preparedness, social integration, cost of education/tuition, exposure to college prior to admission, socio economic status and post-secondary institutions incorporation of targeted programming/data analytics.

The researcher purposed to gain insight about the survey participants at Albany Technical College and the program administrators who served first gen students attending the institution.

Overall, the researcher confirmed much of the literature on the experiences of first gens attending post- secondary institutions. When colleges and universities provided targeted academic and social integration programming, retention and graduation outcomes improve.

Findings Not Confirmed in the Literature

Not confirmed in the literature was the first gen's attitude of commitment regarding degree pursuit and completion. Although research highlighted the myriad of issues and challenges that hindered success, what was commonly overlooked or not considered were students' commitment levels to earning a degree. Lack of commitment coupled with identified challenges not only impeded academic and social integration but impacted future educational, career and economic mobility. In addition to strategic and targeted programming, it is critical post- secondary administrators should consider that despite institutional efforts the decision to

successfully pursue and earn a college degree was primarily the commitment and discretion of the student.

Relationship to Research

Albany Technical College (ATC) was similar to other post-secondary institutions presented in the research. Based on the research collected, the researcher indicated broad based and tailored academic and social programming support the needs of first gen students attending the institution. Study participants' responses aligned with the evidence presented in the literature. The retention and graduation of first gens could improve if targeted measures and systems were implemented by institutions and utilized by students.

Implications

Albany Technical College's(ATC) comprehensive targeted academic and social integration programming was an example to researchers and other post- secondary institutions that retention and graduation success practices begin at the point of enrollment. ATC was a major producer of skilled college graduates to the region of southwest Georgia. Active assessment and engagement with area industry helped to identify academic and social acumens expected of college graduates entering into respective industry markets. In comparison to other area post-secondary institutions within the region, ATC lead in the enrollment, retention and graduation of Move On When Ready (MOWR) students. MOWR students, some of which are first generation are exposed to college while matriculating high school. As a result of the experiences gained from earning college credits or degree while in high school, first gen students in particular advance in post-secondary environments having surmounted challenges related to the experiences of first gens lacking college exposure while matriculating high school.

ATC's intentional efforts to address challenges and experiences that impact success of its largest demographic, the underserved impacting an average retention rate of 59% and an average graduation rate of 47% within the last 10 years. When compared to other comparable south- Georgia two year institutions there was a marked difference of retention and graduation completion. ATC's retention was on average 20% higher in comparison and only 2% less than the national graduation rate of 49%.

Aligned with the governing body, Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) initiatives, ATC improved enrollment an achievement gaps associated with under-represented student groups. Through targeted academic and social integration, job readiness programming, MOWR/dual enrollment, and academic majors that yielded immediate workforce opportunities, ATC improved the region's economic stability.

Recommendations for further study

Albany Tech should serve as an example to researchers and higher ed practitioners that intentional academic and social integration applications in support of the success of challenged student populations not only improved retention and graduation efforts, but can improved institutional presence as well expanded efforts that increased educational and workforce opportunities for all student demographics, especially first gens.

The lead recommendation is researchers expand the study and analysis of targeted programmatic initiatives that impact first gens. As showcased throughout research, institutions with high concentrations of first gens, under-served or at risk student populations that fail to address identified issues are prone to experience diminished enrollment, retention and graduation

of students. Institutions that intentionally implemented measures and systems that counter barriers associated with the population, like ATC, improved retention and graduation opportunities.

The second recommendation to be considered is to expand collaborations between high schools and post-secondary institutions beyond dual enrollment. The challenge of academic preparedness determines a student's ability to successfully matriculate and obtain a college degree. The achievement gap broadens when students enter college not having learned English and math core competencies needed for college matriculation. Collaborative initiatives that include college preparatory and summer bridge training expose and prepare academically challenged to rigors prior to commencement of students' degree pursuit, improving opportunities of academic success.

ATC program administrators studied, indicated that a sub-set of the first gen student demographic that are less inclined to seek academic and social support services. African American and Latino males have lowest retention and graduation numbers in comparison to other students enrolled regardless of first gen status. Studies indicated African American and Latino males only seek support at the stage of academic crisis. Intellectual curiosity, and ability to perform are not the leading issues, instead there is a possible link to the social acceptance from peers that thwarts their decision to fully commit. It is recommended researchers and higher- ed practitioners investigate the specific and unique challenges applicable to this sub-set and how and why these issues impact engagement of support. This research could not only serve post-secondary practitioners, but k-12 practitioners who also share the responsibility of educating diverse student groups.

The final recommendation is researchers expand the body of subject specific to the sociological and psychological effects of being a low socio economic first gen. If education is a tool to bridge inequity gaps, researchers should investigate the possible sociological and psychological reasons why some under-served students grapple or fail to academically adjust and social integration despite access to support resources offered at attending institutions. Research could support education practitioners and systems to improve achievement gaps, and assist students with not succumbing to sociological or psychological challenges that derail overall success.

Table 9 – Recommendations

Research and Collaborations
1. Research should be expanded about the benefits of targeted programming. 2. Broaden collaborations between high schools and post-secondary institutions, improving degree outcomes for diverse student groups. 3. Broaden research on the sociological and psychological effects of being a low socio economic first generation student.

Dissemination

The primary goal will be to develop an abstract of the study and dissemate to journal publishers whose foci are two year and access to post secondary institutions. Both typically have high concentrations of first generation students. Educators can learn and reference the practices outlined in the study for the purpose of improving this demographics' degree obtainment experience. Another dissmenation goal is to engage employers who recruit and select employment candidates hailing from first generation backgrounds. Information presented in the

abstract or the published disseration will guide the understanding of traits and behaviors associated with the population influence activities within and outside of the post-secondary enviroment.

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Appendix A

Student Survey Questions

1. How long have you attended Albany Technical College(ATC)?
2. Compared to your parents are you the first in your family to attend college?
3. Have you experienced any difficulty adjusting academically and or socially to ATC?
4. Are you a full time or part-time student?
5. If you rely on public transportation, does it impact your ability to attend class(es)?
6. Do you receive financial aid to support your tuition cost?
7. Do family or work obligations influence your study/habits or performance?
8. Does your family support your decision to attend college?
9. Are you familiar with Albany Technical College's STARS program?
10. Are you willing to be interviewed and share your thoughts and experiences about the academic and social support provide at Albany Technical College? All interview responses will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in the research.

Appendix B

Student Interview Questions

1. A first generation student is defined as a student whose parents never completed educational programming that would yield a minimum baccalaureate degree, or one never attended a college or university. How do think your status as first gen has influenced success at ATC?

2. Explain your social adjustment or acclimation into Albany Tech's environment.

3. Do you feel you were successfully academically prepared in high school to handle college course work?

4. Was your family supportive of your decision to attend college?

5. Of the list of challenges many first generation students encounter what has been your biggest and why? (lack of family support, transportation issues, college affordability, social integration, academic preparedness).

6. Are their aspects about your background that you feel has influenced your success in college?

7. Prior to your entry into college, how often were you exposed or engaged with others who attended or graduated from college?

8. Are you familiar with ATC's STARS program? If yes, how has it benefited and or served your matriculation?

9. How would you describe the level of support you receive from program administrator's/STARs retention specialists and faculty?

10. What are your overall thoughts about your academic and social integration experiences as a first generation student attending Albany Technical College?
11. Do you take advantage of the academic and social support services offered? Please explain why or why not?

Appendix C
Program Administrator Interview Questions

1. How do think first gens fair both academically and socially at ATC when compared to non-first generation students attending? Please explain-

2. Do you feel first generation students admitted into ATC were academically prepared in high school to handle college course work? Please explain-

3. What are your overall thoughts about the first generation student's academic and social integration experiences at ATC?

4. Based on your experiences with offering support to first gens, do you feel race and or gender factor into the success of their college experiences?

5. How has the low socioeconomic status of first gens attending ATC influenced their college experience?

6. Based on your experience what are your thoughts about first generation students who had consistent exposure and engagement with individuals that completed college in comparison to those first gens who did not?

7. Of the following challenges commonly associated with first generation students, what has influenced the success of first gens attending ATC (lack of family support, transportation issues, college affordability, social integration, academic preparedness).

8. Based on your experience, do first gens take advantage of the academic and social support services offered? Please explain why or why not?

9. When comparing first generation students who actively take advantage of the services provided by the STARS program to non- active first gens what are your thoughts?

10. Of the academic and support services offered to first gens through the STARS program which has yielded the most benefit?

11. How would you describe the level of support offered to first generation students by you, your retention specialist colleagues and faculty?

Appendix D

Wendy Wilson [Student] <wilson_wendy1@columbusstate.edu>

Protocol 18-003 Conditional Expedited Approval

CSU IRB <irb@columbusstate.edu> Tue, Sep 26, 2017 at 2:38 PM

To: "Wendy Wilson [Student]" <wilson_wendy1@columbusstate.edu>, Wendi Jenkins <jenkins_wendi@columbusstate.edu>

Cc: CSU IRB <irb@columbusstate.edu>, Institutional Review Board <instituional_review@columbusstate.edu>

Institutional Review Board

Columbus State University

Date: 9/26/17

Protocol Number: 18-003

Protocol Title: An examination of first generation students and program administrators' perceptions regarding academic and social support offered at Albany Technical College

Principal Investigator: Wendy Wilson

Co-Principal Investigator: Wendi Jenkins

Dear Wendy Wilson:

Representatives of the Columbus State University Institutional Review Board have reviewed your research proposal identified above. It has been determined that the research project poses minimal risk to subjects and qualifies for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110.

Conditional approval is granted for one (1) year from the date of this letter for approximately 60 subjects pending the approval from the listed outside performance site(s). Please note any changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or

incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu or (706) 507-8634.

You must submit a Final Report Form to the IRB once the project is completed or within 12 months from the date of this letter. If the study extends beyond 1 year, you must submit a Project Continuation Form to the IRB. Both forms are located on the CSU IRB website (https://aa.columbusstate.edu/research/irb/). The completed form should be submitted to irb@columbusstate.edu. Please note that either the Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator can complete and submit this form to the IRB. Failure to submit this required form could delay the approval process for future IRB applications.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,

Amber Dees, IRB Coordinator

Institutional Review Board
Columbus State University

Vita

Wendy Wilson

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

An exemplary results oriented professional with proven expertise in Higher Education leadership. Over 14 years of advancing the objectives of senior leadership within the divisions of Institutional Advancement, Student Affairs and the Office of the President. Eager to apply acumens while serving in a key leadership position within a post-secondary institution.

EDUCATION

Ed.D., Higher Education **2017** ***fall***
Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia

M.S., Human Resource Management **2004**
Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan

B.S., Organizational Management and Development **1997**
Bluefield College, Bluefield, Virginia

EXPERIENCE

Albany State University- Branch Campus
Cordele, Georgia

- Serve as executive and chief academic officer of the Cordele Campus
- Manage a budget of 310k
- Supervise eight faculty and four staff members
- Serve as undergraduate research proposal reviewer
- Lead recruitment and retention initiatives
- Promote and market campus academic disciplines
- Support and assist with academic advising
- Served as a member of the Albany State University and Darton State College Consolidation Implementation Committee
- Designed and implemented strategic plan for the remainder of 2016/17 academic calendar
- Host and co-produce Realizing Potential, *(television show) Mediacom's educational channel 19*
- Serve on the Peer Review Board for the Journal of Educators Online

Special Assistant to the President **January 2016 - August 2016**
Strategic Communications and University Relations

Albany State University- Albany, Georgia

- Served as University spokesperson
- Represented and spoke on behalf of the President in his absence
- Wrote informational, marketing materials, scripts and speeches for the President and Cabinet
- Promoted University programs, services through mass media advertising including radio, television, newspapers, magazines, social media networks and website
- Advised and guided senior leadership on the institution's consolidation strategic communication plan
- Wrote University's social media plan
- Hosted and co-produced Realizing Potential, *(television show) Mediacom's educational channel 19*
- Coordinated media interviews, news conferences and public relations events
- Directed media relations for the University ensuring timely coverage of events and news
- Investigated and resolved student, faculty and staff issues that rose to Office of the President
- Served as moderator at Consolidation Town Hall meetings
- Managed crisis communication plan in order to mitigate negative news coverage
- Led University website redesign
- Developed and managed institutional strategies for strengthening relationships with elected officials, public and private entities expanding the institution's presence
- Member of the Albany State University and Darton State College Consolidation Implementation Committee
- Created a communications plan specific to President's role as the consolidation lead
- Served as Consolidation Functional Area Coordinator (Diversity and Inclusion)
- Served as co -chair of Organizational Working Groups (OWG) – Economic Development /Community Relations and Media /Marketing
- Wrote final recommendations for OWGs Economic Development /Community Relations, and Media/Marketing
- Managed a staff of seven (writers, photographer, graphic artist, social media specialist, and clerical support)
- Wrote a communications plan targeting increased support from internal and external stakeholders
- Served as Mistress of Ceremony of the President's Inauguration
- Created and implemented President's Student Advisory Council
- Project lead for Campus Customer Service Initiative
- Managed department budget of 862k

Special Assistant to the President (interim) **November 2013 - December 2015**

Diversity and Special Initiatives
Darton State College - Albany, Georgia

- Served as senior advisor to the President
- Served as point of contact between the President and internal and external college stakeholders
- Represented and spoke on behalf of the President in his absence
- Wrote informational materials, scripts and speeches for the President and Cabinet
- Promoted College programs, services through mass media advertising –television and newspapers
- Coordinated media interviews, news conferences and public relations events
- Served as moderator for events involving the President and other senior leadership
- Participated in institutional planning, policy development and problem resolution
- Prepared communications in support of the President and other college officials
- Conducted and led investigations assigned by the President
- Led institutional task forces- *Classification and Compensation, Compliance, New Student Orientation, Enrollment Management and Climate Assessment*
- Served as college spokesperson
- Served as college Ombudsman
- Served as Title IX Coordinator, March 2014-October 2015
- Managed the African American Male Initiative 2015/15 academic year
- Served as interim Dean of Institutional Advancement (Communications) September-November 2014

- Hosted and co-produced Profiles of Success, *(television show) Mediacom's educational channel 19*
- Assisted with the design and implementation of professional development opportunities for faculty and staff
- Taught DART 1000 (College Orientation) to an average of 40-60 freshmen

Assistant Dean of Diversity **January 2013- November 2013**
Cultural Affairs
Darton State College- Albany, Georgia

- Media spokesperson for events hosted by the Office of Cultural Affairs
- Host and co-produced Profiles of Success, *(television show) Mediacom's educational channel 19*
- Advised administrators on how to best serve diverse populations attending Darton
- Provided academic, financial aid, career advisement to over 150 students
- Collaborated with departments to enhance recruitment and retention of under-represented minority students
- Served as conflict resolution mediator for students, faculty and staff
- Taught COOR 0099 (College Orientation) to an average of 25-30 freshmen

Director **June 2008 - December 2012**
Alumni Affairs
Albany State University Albany, Georgia

- Managed marketing and public relations for alumni and the Office of Alumni Affairs
- Wrote articles for the 2010 Spring and Fall editions of Aspire magazine
- Served as the university liaison to the ASU National Alumni Association
- Hosted and produced *Realizing Potential*, Mediacom's *Channel 19*
- Advised senior administrators on university and division initiatives
- Developed programming to recruit and engage alumni locally and nationally
- Recruited and increased student involvement with the Pre-Alumni Association in 2010 and 2011 by 50%
- Facilitated workshops on the transition from Pre Alumni – Alumni
- Facilitated workshops on resume writing, career development, diversity and etiquette training
- Advised Pre- Alumni Association- 157 students
- Facilitated workshops on conflict resolution, leadership and career development
- Served as event planner for the division of Institutional Advancement and Office of Alumni Affairs
- Coordinated recruitment and expansion efforts of alumni chapters
- Developed and recruited for Ram Corps volunteer program
- Served as lead fundraiser assigned to alumni
- Managed records management of Alumni Research database- 7000 members
- Developed departmental policy and procedure manual
- Wrote and facilitated performance evaluations
- Developed and monitored 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 fiscal year goals for departmental employees
- Co-chaired the 2010 ASU National Alumni Association Planning Conference
- Designed and managed 2010 Annual Fund campaign resulting in 46% increase in new alumni donors
- Co-chaired Homecomings 2009, 2010,2011
- Managed Alumni Affairs budget
- Managed payroll application for assigned staff (ADP system)

Director **February 2008 - June 2008**
University Communications
Albany State University- Albany, Georgia

- Served as University spokesperson
- Managed day to operations of University Communications
- Managed staff of eight- writers, photographer, graphic designers and clerical staff
- Handled public relations and marketing for the university
- Managed the development and dissemination of publications
- Approved press releases
- Wrote on behalf of administrative officials
- Wrote articles for university publications

Director **March 2003 - January 2008**
ACE Fellowship Program and Minority Advising
Darton College- Albany, Georgia

- Taught Coor 0099-College Orientation to freshmen students, class of 25-30 students per semester
- Provided academic, financial aid, career advisement and counseling to over 150 students
- Performed extensive operational functions in student management system, BANNER
- Recruited and registered students on a local and regional level
- Advised students, faculty, and staff regarding judiciary and disciplinary cases
- Successfully managed a budget of $490,000
- Served as media spokesperson for events hosted by Minority Advising and Student Affairs
- Hosted and co-produced Profiles of Success,*(television show) Mediacom's educational channel 19*
- Improved and enhanced campus wide enrichment programs
- Managed on-going scholarship program designed to address the needs of at- risk African American males
- Managed and facilitated minority recruitment initiatives
- Supervised a staff of two (2003-2005)
- Designed and facilitated workshops in the areas of career/professional development and conflict resolution